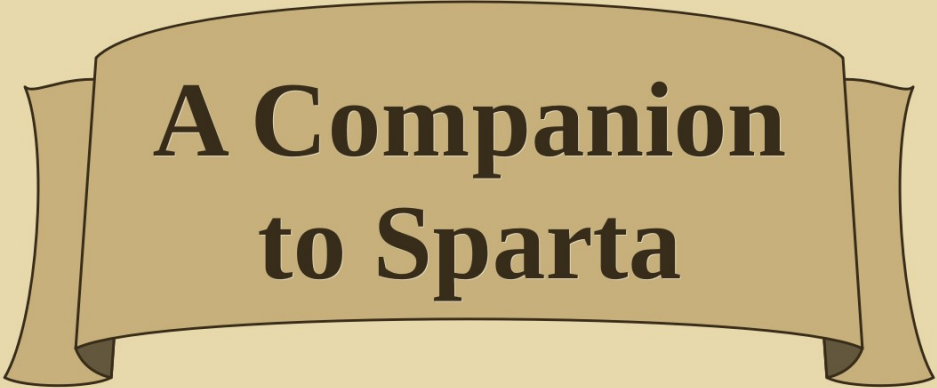




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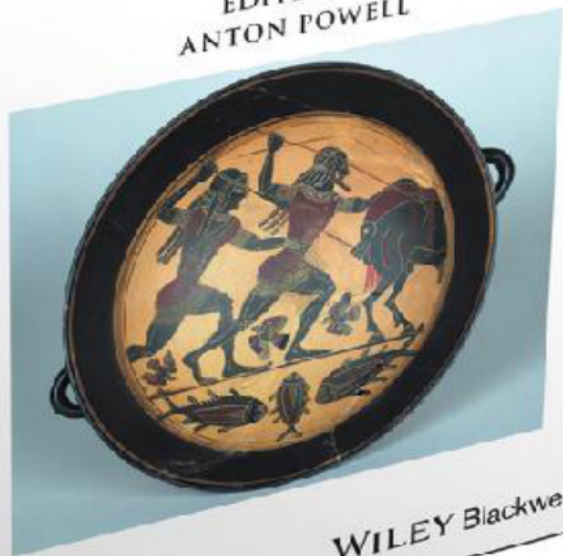
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A COMPANION TO
SPARTA
VOLUME I

EDITED BY
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A COMPANION TO SPARTA

Volume I

Edited by

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Cover Image: Interior of a cup depicting the hunt for the Boar of Calydon, Laconian, c.560 BC (ceramic), Greek, (6th century BC) / Louvre, Paris, France / Bridgeman Images



Map 1 Mainland Greece and the Aegean world, at the time of Sparta's greatest power, c.400 BC

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Maria Pipili is a Greek archaeologist, educated at the Universities of Athens and Oxford (DPhil, 1982). In 1985 she was appointed researcher at the Research Centre for Antiquity of the Academy of Athens where she also served as director from 1994 until her retirement in 2012. Her main research interests are Greek vase painting and iconography, particularly of Sparta. She is author of *Laconian Iconography of the Sixth Century bc* (Oxford 1987), a volume of the *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum* for the National Museum of Athens (1993), several contributions to the *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae* and many articles on Attic and Laconian pottery. She is currently preparing a *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum* volume dedicated to vases from Athenian private collections.

Anton Powell founded the International Sparta Seminar, and was the editor of its first volume, *Classical Sparta: Techniques behind her Success* (London 1989). Since then, with Stephen Hodkinson, he has edited most of the Seminar's volumes, including *The Shadow of Sparta* (London and Swansea 1994) and *Sparta: The Body Politic* (Swansea 2010). His introduction to source criticism in Greek history, *Athens and Sparta*, is in its third edition (London 2016), and his monograph *Virgil the Partisan* (Swansea 2008) was awarded the prize of the American Vergilian Society for 'the book that makes the greatest contribution toward our understanding and appreciation of Vergil'. Powell is also the founder of the Celtic Conference in Classics, and of

the Classical Press of Wales. He has twice been Invited Professor at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris, in 2006 for Greek history and in 2008 for Latin literature.

Francis Prost is Professor of Classical Archaeology at the University Paris 1-Panthéon Sorbonne, and formerly member of the French School of Archaeology in Athens (1994–1998). A specialist in material culture and religious practices of archaic Greece, and in particular of Delos and the heroic sanctuary of the Archegetes Anios, Professor Prost is preparing publication of the corpus of archaic sculpture found on the island. His fieldwork involves excavation of the Delian sanctuary of Apollo, as well as of the Hellenistic city of Euromos in Caria.

James Roy held posts at the Universities of Sheffield (1963–1989) and Nottingham (1989–2004). He also enjoyed a year (1969–70) as a Humboldt-Stipendiat at the University of Heidelberg. Since retiring in 2004 he has been an Honorary Research Associate of the Department of Classics in the University of Nottingham. He has published extensively. Main research interests have included the histories of classical Arkadia, Elis and Olympia, and the interaction between these regions and other parts of the Peloponnese.

Françoise Ruzé is Emeritus Professor at the University of Caen, where for many years she conducted and directed research on Greek societies of the archaic and classical periods. Her books include *Délibération et pouvoir dans la cité grecque, de Nestor à Socrate* (Paris 1997); *Sparte: géographie, mythes et histoire* (with Jacqueline Christien; Paris 2007). Professor Ruzé is currently preparing a monograph on *Les législateurs du monde grec archaïque*.

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Hans van Wees is currently Grote Professor of Ancient History at University College London. He is among the world's foremost experts on the warfare, ethics and economy of Greece, from the time of the Homeric poems onwards. His noted books include *Status Warriors: War, Violence and Society in Homer and History* (Amsterdam 1992), *Greek Warfare: Myths and Realities* (London 2004) and *Ships and Silver, Taxes and Tribute: A Fiscal History of Archaic Athens* (London 2013).

Foreword

Paul Cartledge

Clare College, Cambridge

‘Sparta Lives’

‘We think Sparta will be really popular across a wide range of territories ...’. This quotation is not actually taken from the blurb of an optimistic academic publisher, as one might have thought, but from a promotional statement (in 2016) by a Casino slot games developer, Habanero.

Ancient Sparta does still achieve massive resonance in the modern world, in other words, but not always in the places and through the media that a scholar might perhaps ideally wish. The movie *300* is another prize exhibit in that same category. Happily, the two volumes to which I have the privilege to be writing this Foreword will go a long way towards righting the balance.

I begin by declaring an interest – my own, in studying this peculiar (in at least one sense) ancient community. This interest started with an undergraduate essay on the hoplite ‘revolution’ (if such it was) of the seventh century BC. In its original form this was written in 1968 for my New College Oxford tutor, Geoffrey de Ste. Croix, whom the magnificent editor of this *Companion* boldly but not implausibly styles the modern founder of the scholarly study of ancient Sparta. A much later version was published in the *Journal of Hellenic Studies* in 1977 and republished in German translation and with addenda in a splendid 1986 *Wissenschaftliches Buchgesellschaft* volume devoted to Sparta and edited by the eminent Karl Christ. At the back of that volume will be found a comprehensive, calibrated bibliography organized by topic; at its front, a remarkably comprehensive and insightful introduction to modern Spartan scholarship by the editor himself. The modern scholarly literature on Sparta going back to the work of J.C.F. Manso (1800–1805) is simply immense. It is beautifully if only partially placed in context by Elizabeth Rawson’s *The Spartan Tradition in European Thought* (Oxford 1969, 1991), though ‘European’ for her includes ‘North American’.

Ste. Croix was both a colleague and a sparring partner of George Forrest, one of the two examiners of my Oxford doctoral thesis on early Sparta c.950–650 BC, completed in 1975. (The other examiner, since this was a mainly archaeological thesis, was the distinguished Oxford art historian Professor Martin Robertson; my supervisor was John Boardman, then plain ‘Mr’, now

Sir John.) In 1968 Forrest had published with Hutchinson a slim, streamlined volume entitled *A History of Sparta 950-192 BC*. It had been read for him in draft by an Oxonian Sparta expert of an earlier generation, H.T. Wade-Gery (one-time lover of historical novelist Naomi Mitchison, author of *Black Sparta*, 1928, and *The Corn King and the Spring Queen*, 1933). ‘This account’, its left-wing author confessed – or rather boasted, ‘has not shown much sympathy with Sparta; sympathy is killed by the narrow-minded jealousy she showed for so long to anyone whose power looked like becoming greater than her own and by the utter inhumanity of her behaviour when her own power was supreme.’ It is indeed hard to preserve a pose of objectivity when faced with the Spartan myth, mirage, legend or tradition.

Forrest’s little book was reprinted in 1980 in what the new publisher (Duckworth) was pleased to call a ‘second edition’. This actually came with only the addition of an intriguing new Preface in which the author was kind enough to refer to my 1979 monograph, the book of my DPhil thesis, as a ‘major’ work. But at the end of that Preface Forrest uttered a far more controversial – to me – opinion, that there existed some ‘overall agreement’ as to the ‘kind of society’ almost all students now believed Sparta to have been. Had he been writing that Preface after 1994 (and the second edition of the book was reprinted in 1995, by the Bristol Classical Press), I don’t believe he could possibly have been so blandly confident. For in that year the redoubtable editorial duo of ‘Powell & Hodkinson’ (or, by alternation, ‘Hodkinson & Powell’) published the first of their long-running series of superbly edited collections on themes or aspects of ancient Spartan history that have been crucial in helping to radically transform our scholarly perceptions and representations of this extraordinary community. The present *Companion* is their worthy successor, and indeed rightly contains essays by several of the editor’s previous contributors and collaborators.

By my reckoning eight of the twenty-five *Companion* authors are British or British-based, seven are from the USA, with six French, two Italians and one each German and Greek. Apart from anything else, this reminds us that there are distinct national traditions of Spartan scholarship: especially German (nicely recapitulated in the Christ volume); French (one thinks of the two foundational volumes of François Ollier on what he baptized ‘le mirage spartiate’); Italian (I am proud to own what was once Wade-Gery’s copy of Luigi Pareti’s 1917 *Storia di Sparta arcaica*, to which Massimo Nafisso’s *La nascita del kosmos*, also 1994, is a very worthy successor); and North American (Tom Figueira is a standout); but also Japanese (Mariko Sakurai), among others. It is of course invidious to single out any particular chapters of the present *Companion* for mention ... but I’m going to do so anyhow: those of Hodkinson, Cavanagh, Powell ([Chapter 11](#)), van Wees, Flower, Millender ([Chapter 19](#)), and Rebenich.

And I shall proceed homerically, *husteron proteron*, starting with **Stefan**

Rebenich's elegant and acute summation of 'The Reception of Sparta in Germany and German-speaking Europe' ([Chapter 27](#)). Reception studies are hot these days, but we Spartanists or Spartalogues were in on the act right from the very start. Hence all those books and articles on Sparta with 'myth' (Moses Finley), 'mirage' (Ollier), 'legend' (the Swede Eugene Napoleon Tigerstedt) or 'tradition' (Rawson) in their titles. The underlying reasons and motivations for Spartan reception-fixation are fairly obvious: the available written evidence not only is overwhelmingly non-Spartan but also deeply bifurcated either pro or con, with few or no shades of grey in between. Epigraphy can do something to help us correct for this imbalance, archaeology of various kinds an awful lot more. But there remains the fundamental problem of (to borrow the editor's eloquent formulation) 'Reconstructing (Spartan) History from Secrecy, Lies and Myth'. One way of avoiding the dilemma is by embracing it head on, as does Rebenich: all history, it's been claimed, is contemporary history – but there can be few more startling and unsettling illustrations of that useful nostrum than the reinvention of Sparta as the prototype of the new German National Socialist community of the 1920s and 1930s. Indeed, that reinvention has probably done more than anything else to ensure that at least for the foreseeable future Sparta is more likely to figure as a model or ideal of dystopia than of the (e)utopias of yesteryear.

One scholar who has never underestimated the potentially distorting power of the – predominantly, in this case, Athenocentric – Spartan tradition is the American **Ellen Millender** ([Chapter 19](#)). Building on research going back ultimately to her 1996 University of Pennsylvania doctoral dissertation, she brilliantly displays and explicates not only the fascination – and horror – the women of Sparta aroused in, say, Euripides and Aristotle but also the exceptional degree of economic independence and even political power that they were allowed or chose to enjoy and exploit. But before one rushes to feminist-inspired judgement, one must also factor in the overall conclusion she draws from her balanced and profound examination of the – often unsatisfactory – evidence: that 'Spartan women's lives did not significantly differ from those of their Athenian counterparts in terms of their fundamental roles and obligations as daughters, wives, and mothers'. Princesses, queens and priestesses were not, after all, 'typical' Spartan women.

Michael Flower ([Chapter 16](#)) too includes 'Women' as a special category in his chapter on Spartan religion. The ancient Greeks, notoriously, did not 'have a word for' religion: they spoke rather of 'the things of the god(s)' or of 'the divine'. Herodotus, a particularly well informed and committed observer of all things religious, from a specifically cross-cultural comparativist perspective, twice remarked in his *Histories* that the Spartans treated the things of the gods as more significant and serious than the things of men. Well, almost all Greeks collectively and individually did that, so he must have been trying to

make a special point about just how exceptional was the Spartans' attitude to the religious factor in political, military, diplomatic and other public affairs. Flower takes that point to the full and produces a splendid synopsis of Spartan religiosity in all its peculiarity, showing beyond a peradventure that it 'comprised a coherent, interconnected, and mutually reinforcing set of beliefs and practices that formed a system'.

Besides editing the *Companion* and contributing its opening and concluding chapters, **Anton Powell** also writes an incisive [Chapter 11](#) on roughly the period of Thucydides's history of the Atheno-Peloponnesian War, from 478 (the foundation of Athens's Delian League, from which Sparta abstained or was excluded) to 403 (the year in which Sparta, then still hegemon of much of the Aegean Greek world, permitted the Athenians to restore their democracy). Powell takes as his leitmotif what the Greeks called *kairos*, or, to borrow the title of an article he published in 1980 that has more than just stood the test of time, 'Athens' difficulty, Sparta's opportunity'. Again, as in his introductory chapter, he recurs tellingly to Sparta's unusual 'capacity ... for organized deception on a grand scale' on the international stage, noting its coexistence with a paradoxical combination of austerity with great wealth at home. He concludes with a novel, internalist explanation for Sparta's 'extraordinary forbearance towards Athenian democrats': something which I myself have associated with the rather particular and unusual attitude towards democracy of King Pausanias, who died, from choice in one sense, in the democratic Arcadian city of Mantinea.

London-based Dutch scholar **Hans van Wees** has made immeasurable contributions to our better understanding of pre-classical, Archaic Greek history both in its totality and at the regional or local scale, for example the financing of the late Archaic Athenian navy. Here he is appropriately afforded the luxury of two consecutive chapters ([Chapters 8](#) and [9](#)); the first precisely on luxury, austerity and equality in archaic and early classical Sparta, the second specifically on the distinctively organized system of common messes. The Spartans themselves tended to want to believe, and want others to believe, that their basic political, military, social, economic and cultural institutions had all been invented, possibly simultaneously, at any rate in some dim and very distant past, after which they had changed if at all only minimally. Moses Finley in a game-changing article of 1968 had argued rather for the occurrence of a much later, that is much more recent 'sixth-century revolution'. Van Wees goes further, or rather later, by downdating the introduction of the classical messes to the very end of the sixth century. Plausibly, he sees this measure as aimed primarily to minimize internal class tension arising from extremes of economic inequality within the Spartiate group. Even more plausibly, to me, he argues that 'Sparta's specific solution was extreme'.

Among the archaeologists of several countries (Greece, France, the

Netherlands, Britain) working within Lakonia during the past generation, few, if any, have equalled let alone exceeded the range of Nottingham University's **William (Bill) Cavanagh** ([Chapter 3](#)). From the continued re-excavation of Neolithic Kouphovouno (co-directed by him with the late Christopher Mee) to an intensive field survey of the extant ancient remains detectable today on the ground within an area just to the east and north-east of modern Sparta, by way of a scientific analysis of Laconian lead artefacts, he has blazed a trail in producing fresh material data and applying the latest techniques of analysis to elucidate them. He properly contextualizes, of course, the very recent discovery and ongoing excavation (led by Adamantia Vasilogamvrou) of what must unarguably be Mycenaean ('Homeric') Sparta, at Ay. Vasileios, and brings readers up to date with the latest archaeohistorical findings regarding the sociopolitically crucial Ortheia and Menelaion cult sites. But, in their way, at least as important for our understanding of archaic and classical Sparta and Lakonia is his summarizing of the results of intensive field survey and his identification of, and emphasis upon, the 'unique character of Spartan popular cult' as attested primarily by votives in terracotta and lead.

Finally, I cite *honoris causa* **Stephen Hodkinson**'s typically thoughtful and carefully argued exploration ([Chapter 2](#)) of the supposed or alleged domination of Spartan state over Spartan society. The key word of his title is 'exceptional', since this recalls an absolutely key and fundamental disagreement, even dispute, between himself and Mogens Herman Hansen. Hansen and he agree that 'state' is a viable term of analysis, indeed probably more viable for Sparta than for the other thousand or so Greek *poleis* and *ethne* in which capital-S State institutions were typically relatively underdeveloped and underpowered. (Others believe that even in Sparta the capital-S State was relatively evanescent, at least by comparison with anything that Thomas Hobbes would have recognized.) But they differ, strongly, over Sparta's exceptionality.

This is not the place for me to rehearse the arguments, so suffice it to say here that my interpretative sympathies lie wholly and emphatically on Hansen's side of the argument. (And not just as regards the relation between 'state' and 'society', but across the board – in respect of, among other things, communal educational practice, the status and treatment of women, the place and mode of religion, for example in the disposal of the dead, and so on and so forth.) But if Sparta does indeed still 'live', as my title (pro)claims, that is precisely because of the ongoing fertility of such contentious and yet cogently argued differences of opinion on some of the most important issues to be subjected to what we today – following our original master, Herodotus – call *historia*, critical enquiry.

Preface

The Spartans, who for long opposed complex literacy on principle, would have disapproved of the present work for many reasons. Above all, perhaps, because our work is willing to highlight change within Sparta, whereas Spartans themselves preferred to think – or at least to tell outsiders – about a timeless Sparta, which had achieved near-perfection through following the rules of a certain Lykourgos (Lycurgus). It was partly to explore the idea of *change* within Sparta that the first of our two volumes has been structured chronologically, whereas the second volume is structured by theme. But even in this respect one cannot be clear cut: the second, thematic, volume also investigates change within ‘Lykourgan’ practice.

We have been fortunate to attract for this project contributions from most of the internationally recognized leaders of contemporary scholarship on Sparta. This has meant that numerous chapters have needed translation into English, a long process. The editor hopes that the long gestation of our project will be found justified by the quality of the resulting papers, in particular from eminent scholars in France, Italy and Switzerland.

Our two volumes are, in the Wiley-Blackwell tradition of ‘Companions’, in part a survey of existing scholarship. But, as happily is inevitable where there is a cast of experts, the work is also intended as an array of new research from our various specialist authors.

The nature of Sparta generated, for Greeks elsewhere, awe, speculation and sometimes incredulity. Ancient disagreement as to what the Spartans were, and what they did, has helped generate much diversity in modern scholarship. Where our own authors have diverged in interpretation we have of course not sought to impose a common position. Instead, we have sought to signal to readers the fact of divergence, and to give free rein to authors in advocating their own positions. Current scholarship on Sparta has, for example, reached no consensus as to the time, or even the century, when Sparta’s famous ‘austere’ constitution came into being, and whether it did so gradually over a long period or – largely – through a revolutionary ‘Big Bang’. There is even debate within these volumes as to how exceptional – or how typically Greek – Sparta’s way of life really was. The Spartans themselves insisted so emphatically, so often, on their society’s uniqueness that we should at least enquire whether in this they ‘protested too much’.

Since living scholarship must always be a work in progress, open to criticism and innovation not least from the young, brief speculation may be justified here as to future developments in Spartan studies. One trend already visible is

the study of the special interests and biases of particular ancient sources which have helped to form our compound image of Sparta. How, for example, did classical Athenian mentalities, or Graeco-Roman views centuries later, shape the surviving picture of Sparta? How did particular authors, such as Herodotos, Thucydides, Plutarch and others, have access to, and shape for their own varied purposes, information about Spartans? And, especially with a society so productive of myth-making as Sparta was, there is a need for the anchor of archaeology. Even the Spartans, masters of secrecy and of manipulating the record of their own past, could not thoroughly efface what already lay buried in their own ground or further afield. The present work gives much attention to recent archaeology. But archaeology of the future will much enrich, and no doubt alter the course of, Spartan studies. Here a controversial note may be added. The archaeology of Sparta has sometimes been slow to confront certain sensitive matters. There is the enduring unavailability for study of most of the many thousands of lead figurines found at Sparta and portraying the dress, the ideals, the interests of Spartan men and women. Even the published photographs of these are few, old and often hard to read. The dark places of modern archaeology should be seen not as embarrassments to be avoided, but as sites unusually rich in potential for fresh scholarship.

The study of Sparta through particular non-Spartan authors, and through archaeology, involves the combining of scholarly methods which – as expert studies multiply – otherwise tend to develop in increasing isolation from each other. By insisting on the need to bridge our various specialisms, Spartan studies are well placed to make themselves a model for the study of the Ancient World.

Contributions to this work keep their authors' own choice of English spellings, as between American and British forms. We have, however, sought wherever possible to Hellenize spellings of Greek terms, thus 'Lykourgos' and 'Lysandros' not 'Lycurgus' and 'Lysander', and to reduce established Latinisms, such as 'Thucydides', to the conventional minimum.

The editor wishes to thank contributors for their extraordinary patience over the work's long time in preparation. And this Preface should end, as the work proper begins, with a reference to Paul Cartledge, widely acknowledged as foremost among today's students of Sparta. His contribution to the present work goes far beyond the writing of its Foreword. The influence of his decades of meticulous scholarship is to be found throughout our volumes. The fact that internationally harmonious work on Sparta can be attempted at all is in important part due to the generosity, diplomacy and inclusiveness of Cartledge's *oeuvre*, both written and oral. On this one point we may concur with the Spartans, believers in Lykourgos: the temperament of a single person can, sometimes, help generate an enduring culture.

Anton Powell
Swansea, September 2016

PART I

Reconstructing Sparta: General

CHAPTER 1

Sparta: *Reconstructing History from Secrecy, Lies and Myth*

Anton Powell

To understand Sparta involves one of the most fruitful, and difficult, challenges in the study of the ancient world. The techniques which are developed in the process are intensely relevant also to the modern world. They address the question ‘How to understand a secretive foreign state, or organization, an unfamiliar culture skilled in the orchestration of propaganda, visual images and lies?’ More than any other, Sparta was the state which other Greeks, of the classical period and later, admired. That Sparta had achieved something of unique importance is clear to us from two facts. Faced with an uncountably large invasion force led by Persia, in 480, those Greek states which resisted chose to do so under the leadership of Sparta, and of Sparta alone. Seventy-five years after that triumphant resistance, Sparta had crushed a new challenger. She had defeated the Athenian empire. Whether to obliterate Athens itself was, in 404, an administrative decision for Sparta’s leading men to take at their leisure. Sparta at that point held in her hand the future of Greek history. She had the power to abolish Athens, the capital of Greek literacy, of reflection – and of historical writing. From Sparta’s decision to spare the city flowed the survival of those written records which allowed posterity, us, to write the history of Greece, and of Sparta herself. Sparta, in short, was classical Greece’s superpower: the military patron – without knowing, or wishing, it – of what would become western civilization.

The superpower, even in its moments of victory, was not content. In the decade after her conquest of Athens, Sparta twice attempted to conquer the Persian Empire. Yet Sparta was – in citizen population – tiny, small even by the standards of a Greek *polis*. Its citizens, ‘Spartiates’, were the inhabitants of a few southern-Greek villages by the River Eurotas in Laconia. These men, evidently of extraordinary morale, aimed to defeat an empire which stretched from the eastern Mediterranean coast (today’s western Turkey) to Egypt, Afghanistan and the borders of India. Some thirty Spartan officers under king Agesilaos were considered sufficient to command the second, more formal, invasion of Persian territory, in 396. Sparta’s confidence, and the culture which generated it, will be one of the themes of this book. Yet, less than thirty years later, Sparta’s own hegemony suddenly ended. Beaten in 371 at Leuktra by another Greek army, that of Thebes, Sparta lost about half of her domestic territory, and thereafter her power was confined to the Peloponnese. For the

rest of Antiquity, Sparta was never more than a scheming imitator of her former self.

1.1 Ancient – and Modern – Views of Sparta

These extremes of power and weakness have led to deeply diverse images of Sparta. In Sparta's imperious days of the fifth century, her power was taken for granted by other Greeks. Our two best sources for that period, Herodotos and Thucydides, nowhere explain at length to what Sparta owed her power. Both those writers make extraordinary, though brief, claims about the extreme stability of Sparta's form of government, and way of life. According to Thucydides (writing around 400 BC), Sparta had been a well-run, stable *polis* for 'slightly more than 400 years, approximately' (1.18.1; compare Hdt.1.65). This internal stability, with its avoidance of turbulent in-fighting, of the *stasis* which plagued so many Greek cities, was, Thucydides believed, the main reason why Sparta was free to direct its energies outwards, towards the control of others. Herodotos, and even sometimes the austere Thucydides, tell colourful anecdotes to Sparta's credit. It is from Herodotos, for example, that we have the story of Spartan warriors calmly combing their hair in the face of death at Thermopylai (7.208). Thucydides, an Athenian who campaigned as a general against Sparta, could make a sweeping negative judgement of Sparta's military qualities. He writes about the Peloponnesian War (431–404), that the Spartans 'proved to be in many ways the most convenient enemies that the Athenians could have had' (8.96.5). But to interpret such negativity we need to remember why writers write. They do not write in order to state only the obvious; they privilege paradox and novelty and, as is very plain in Thucydides' case, seek to correct public opinion. Thucydides was writing for an initial readership which knew that Sparta had defeated Athens (or was likely soon to do so). He wrote to *adjust* public opinion – and that opinion almost certainly was that Sparta had a superlative military machine, made possible by an extraordinary, if ruthless, political system at home.

Much of Spartan history is constructed from passing remarks and hints in Herodotos and Thucydides. Such comment was far easier for contemporary Greeks to interpret than it is for ourselves. Yet since 1970 Spartan studies have been refounded and have developed more rapidly, perhaps, than ever before. This has been made possible above all by the demonstration of how much information about Sparta could be extracted, ingeniously and convincingly, from the scattered remarks of Thucydides. The person who performed that demonstration was Geoffrey de Ste. Croix, in his book *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War* (1972). Following his work, scholars have looked with new and fruitful optimism for significant traces of Spartan reality not only in Thucydides but also in Herodotos, Xenophon, Plato, Aristotle,

Plutarch, and many other writers. Even where Sparta is not named, ancient ideas often turn out to be Sparta-shaped. When in 431/0 Perikles issued his enduring eulogy of Athens (as recorded, and no doubt reshaped, by his Athenian colleague Thucydides), Sparta is present as a defining shadow. Perikles boasts that Athens is an open city, unlike – he says – others (unnamed) who drive out foreigners to hide their military secrets: he means Sparta (Th.2.39.1). Athens is *an* education for Greece, says Perikles (Th.2.41.1). He admits, by implication, that *the* famous education was that of Sparta, where – most unusually – education for citizen boys was provided by the state, with famous and extraordinary results. At the height of Sparta's power, after her conquest of Athens, one question became too clear and important to be ignored. Two Athenians, Kritias and Xenophon, wrote short works to explain Sparta's unique success. The question, as Xenophon posed it in the first sentence of his *Constitution of the Spartans* (Lak. Pol.1.1.), defined ideas about Sparta, both in Antiquity and often today: 'I reflected on the startling fact that the population of Sparta is among the smallest in Greece and yet it has become the most powerful and famous state of all Greece.' To explain that unique achievement, Xenophon's text dwells on, no doubt exaggerates, what was different, or unique, about life within Sparta: how did Sparta form its men and (Xenophon rightly insists) its women? For human character – the Spartans had understood – was plastic. Culture was artificial, ingrained not inborn: education mattered and especially childhood education, *paideia* (the word attributed to Perikles in the Funeral Speech). Analysts influenced by Xenophon have tended to seek to explain Spartan *success*.

The last years of Sparta's hegemony, the 380s and 370s, saw a sharp decline in the state's moral reputation. Spartan officers, employing their city's traditional sense of military opportunity (see this volume, [Chapter 11](#)), seized control of Thebes in peacetime (382), and attempted as much against Peiraieus, the port of Athens (378). Such unprovoked aggression severely disappointed even Xenophon, himself a friend and client of a Spartan king, Agesilaos. In a late [chapter \(14\)](#) of the *Lak. Pol.* Xenophon abruptly diverges from the eulogy in earlier chapters, and virtually rants against Spartan moral decadence in his own day. Plato in both of his long, theoretical texts describing imaginary, ideal city-states, gives polarized images of Sparta. Many aspects of Spartan life, such as state education and the limiting of personal wealth, are clearly a source of positive inspiration in the *Republic* and the *Laws*. In other ways, these same texts criticize Sparta for falling short of her own ideals, for disobeying her own apparent logic – as, for example, in making girls do aggressive exercises but not letting women become soldiers. Plato lived through Sparta's widest hegemony, then through her loss of moral reputation, then her military humiliation. The deep structure of his political works is shaped by Sparta, in ways which his modern commentators, themselves often unfamiliar with Spartan history, have frequently missed. Clearer, and so more influential today, are the signs of his own

disappointment, as Spartans, a community which *could* have done so much, morally, proved too interested in private wealth. On such matters, like Xenophon in the anomalous [chapter 14](#) of the *Lak. Pol.*, Plato may even have been preaching to the Spartans of his own day.

Aristotle, Plato's pupil, lived all his adult life in the period following Sparta's fall. His attitude towards Sparta is less conflicted than Plato's. He argues explicitly in the *Politics* against using Sparta as an ideal. Intimately contradicting his former master, he dwells on what he sees as reasons for Sparta's failure. Rather than advocating more influence for women, Aristotle argues that Spartan women in several ways were over-assertive and had been responsible for Sparta's decline. Women, for Aristotle, are implicated in Sparta's drift away from official egalitarianism and towards the concentration of wealth in dangerously few hands. Now, Aristotle is – deservedly – of immense influence in forming modern views of Sparta, even though few follow the spirit of his incriminatory remarks about women. His work has tended to encourage in modern scholars the opposite question to that posed by Xenophon: not 'Why did Sparta succeed?', but 'Why did she fail?' However, if we ask why Aristotle made his anti-Spartan arguments with such energy, we may suspect that he needed to counter a still-powerful view in the mid fourth century that Sparta had *not* failed, even that a military comeback by Sparta was possible.

The view that Sparta in the classical period had been, overall, a success was held by sentimental, but still influential, writers of the post-classical period. For philosophers, who also tended to be professional teachers, Sparta fascinated by the example of what education could achieve, if applied widely, rigorously and from an early age. Also, as mainland Greece lost its power and self-confidence, first under Macedonian conquest from the age of Philip and Alexander, then under Roman rule, the idea of bygone Sparta – like that of bygone Athens – provided consolation and a prop to Greek morale.

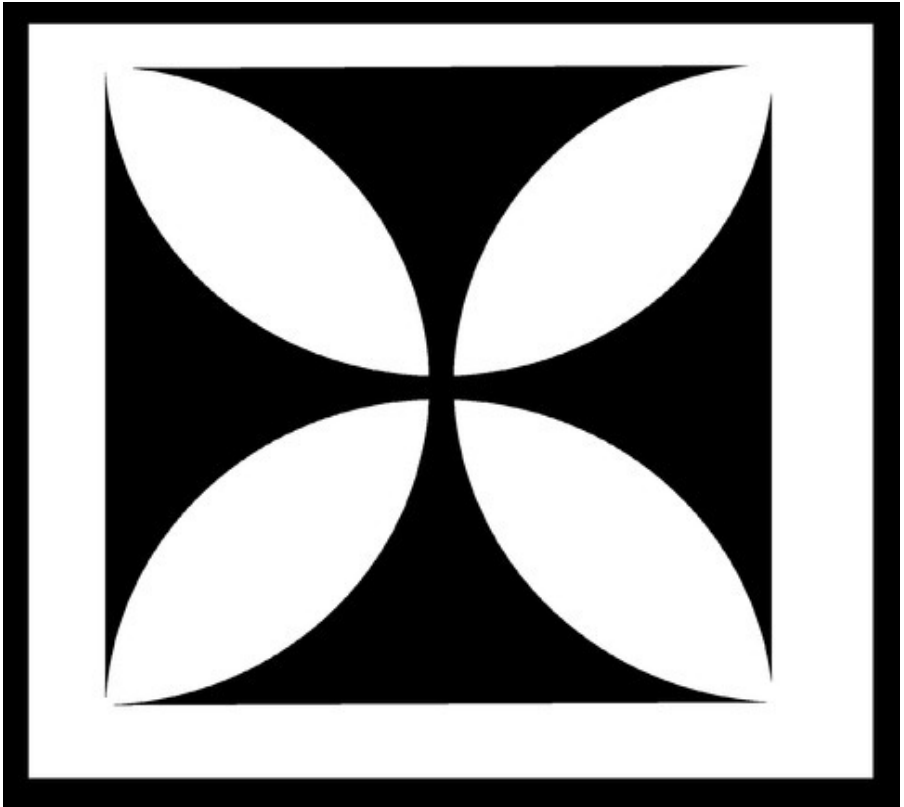
Plutarch, whose *Life of Sparta's* mythical founder Lykourgos is now the easiest ancient text to use – and *abuse* – to gain a view of life within Sparta, wrote this 'biography' as part of a grand project of recounting the lives of eminent Greeks and Romans in pairs and in parallel. We sense his anxious desire to elevate the Greek past to the rank of the Roman present. In his *Perikles* (ch. 12) he writes that surviving Greek temples are, in his day (the early 2nd century AD), the *only* (obvious) proof that Greek achievement once matched that of Rome; indeed, he claims, Greek architectural splendour excelled that of Rome until the end of the Roman Republic (*Comparison of Perikles and Fabius Maximus*, 3). Bygone Sparta, for Plutarch, was a necessary part of Greece's moral heritage. The enthusiastically positive picture of Sparta given in the *Lykourgos* was profoundly influential in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, modern scholarship has reduced Plutarch's credit in matters Spartan. Respect for his intellect has, if anything, grown in

recent years, but alongside that has developed an awareness not only of his patriotic concerns but also of how remote he was from the events he described, how susceptible he was to myth-making about the Spartan past. He visited Sparta, where an enthusiastically exaggerated re-enactment of past glories was in full swing. ‘I saw boys whipped to death’ (he writes, unambiguously: *Lykourgos*, 18), a proof of local heroism.

With ancient writers encouraging extreme attitudes towards Sparta, whether negative or positive, it is profoundly tempting for modern observers to tend themselves towards one or the other pole. Sometimes the poles subtly reinforce each other. Spartans themselves encouraged the view that they were simple soldiers, ignorant in many matters, relying more on noble practice than on complex thought (e.g. *Hdt.*3.46, *Thuc.*1.86.1, *Xen.Lak. Pol.*11.7). In a different spirit Thucydides, as we have seen, wrote of Spartan high military incompetence. Many scholars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries vigorously condemned Spartan ‘folly’, ‘arrogant stupidity’, disastrous ineptitude, ‘characteristic ...lack of foresight’. One eminent historian (in 1981) even suggested that there may never have been such a thing as ‘a very intelligent Spartan’. Such was, until recently, almost an orthodoxy (for a brief anthology, see Powell (2016, 102), leaving an unsolved puzzle: How could such people, so stupid and so few, dominate Greece for some 150 years – and defeat the far more numerous and supposedly far more intelligent Athenians? A more modern and fruitful approach, useful whether in international politics or with a neighbour in the street, is to look for the logic even, and indeed especially, of people we may not like. And it is important to note that few modern scholars actually *like* the Spartans.

In other ways too, understanding Sparta involves combining thoughts and feelings which do not go easily together. In the fifth century *both* Sparta and Athens show patterns of aggressive expansion, against the interests of the other (see this volume, [Chapter 11](#)). Modern scholars, however, have tended to align morally, seeing *either* blameworthy Athenian expansion *or* blameworthy Spartan aggression. (The best-known representatives of these conflicting tendencies are, respectively, E. Badian (1993), and G.E.M. de Ste. Croix (1972).) Again, how typically Greek was Sparta? Was she – as Xenophon insisted – a unique exception to Greek norms? Stephen Hodkinson well shows ((2009b) and this volume, [Chapter 2](#)) that much about Sparta was remarkably normal by Greek standards. Should we then go further and completely normalize Sparta? That might leave Sparta’s unique power inexplicable. Likewise, we may be tempted to see Sparta overall as a success or a failure, and in the process to privilege one set of information, one sort of explanation, to the detriment of another. In reality, Sparta – at least in her own terms – was *both* a unique success and a sad failure depending on the period studied, or the *aspect* studied within a single period. To accept such an overall view may seem simple in the abstract. But to apply it in detail to the study of

Sparta may be far harder. Our psychology may resist such things, as when we see different patterns in a Maltese Cross. Faced with this (see image below),



at a single moment we focus either on the white segments or the black arms: our brains cannot easily manage both simultaneously. Yet however we focus predominantly, whether on the aggression Sparta suffered or committed, on her normality or her uniqueness as a Greek community, on her success or her failure, we should, as with the Maltese Cross, never forget that the other aspect exists.

1.2 Secrecy, Lies and Detailed Stories

Thucydides, the most astute historian of Antiquity, admitted his problem. It was impossible to know certain military details about the Spartans ‘because of the secrecy of their state’ (5.68.2). This recalls Perikles’ implication, reported by Thucydides, that Sparta used formal expulsions of other Greeks (*xenēlasiai*) to hide military secrets, and relied in military matters on ‘training and acts of deception’ (2.39.1). But in the former passage Thucydides speaks in his own voice: he clearly suggests that the very structure of Spartan politics and community life was normally subject to concealment. Now, such

concealment requires an effort, and is likely therefore to be done for a conscious and compelling reason. For Perikles, who was very likely right, that reason was military. Sparta was surrounded and greatly outnumbered by potential enemies. Even in her homeland, Sparta's citizen population was dwarfed by that of the helots, Greek-speakers, natives of the region, whose status was akin to that of slaves. Sparta exceeded other Greek states, according to Thucydides, in the number (or, perhaps, proportion) formed by this unfree population (8.40.2 and see Figueira, this work, [Chapter 22](#)). Here was always the potential for internal war, between helot and master. Modern societies, including democratic ones, recognize the close relation between war and intense secrecy. In the Britain of World War II, military research was described as 'hush, hush'. The population was instructed to 'Be like dad. Keep mum!' [i.e., Don't talk]. Warning posters showed housewives tempted to talk about where their male relatives were serving as soldiers; behind them in the food queue was pictured, ears pricked, Adolf Hitler.

Modern studies of Sparta readily follow Thucydides in admitting that Spartan secrecy existed, and that it poses problems for the historian. Scholars have, however, been far less ready to confront another, kindred, form of behaviour attributed to Sparta on good, contemporary authority: organized lying. Thucydides recounts how the Spartan authorities in the 420s identified and removed the most spirited and impressive helots, those who might one day become formidable as leaders of a revolution. An official announcement was made. Those helots who had distinguished themselves on Sparta's behalf in her recent wars should come forward, so that Sparta could reward them with freedom. Some 2000 were duly selected. They were allowed to celebrate conspicuously in public. And Sparta then secretly killed them all: 'No one knew how each of them died', writes Thucydides (4.80.2–4). But for lying by Spartans, Xenophon, Sparta's ally and partisan, is our most telling source. He describes, without disapproval, how Spartan military commanders reacted to the news that the Spartan navy, elsewhere, had suffered a crushing defeat (*Hell.* 1.6.36–7, 4.3.13–14). In 406 (after the defeat at Arginousai), and in 394 (after that of Knidos), the bad tidings were deliberately inverted, and a Spartan commander in pretended triumph reported a great victory. In each case, the commander who arranged this, and the energetic celebrations which accompanied it, was almost certainly deceiving his own, Spartan, soldiers, as well as his allies from other cities. He would be sure that his deception would be discovered before long. He evidently assumed that his morale-boosting lies would be accepted by his fellow citizens, with retrospect. Xenophon states that after one of these charades, the troops fought better and won a victory as a result of having been deceived. When eulogizing his patron and friend king Agesilaos of Sparta, Xenophon describes him as more honourable and straightforward than his Persian enemy, Tissaphernes. But, once war was formally declared, 'deception as a result became religiously permissible and just, he completely outclassed Tissaphernes in deceit'. Xenophon meant this

as a compliment: deceit, he says here, was *stratēgikon*, the quality of a good general (*Ages.* 1.10–13, 17). He approvingly records the trick enacted by another Spartan general, Pasimakhos. Enemies might be duly wary of Sparta's hoplites, with the dreaded lambda (Λ, for 'Lakedaimonioi') painted on each shield. But Pasimakhos sought to lure the enemy into complacency, by disguising his men with the shields of mediocre Sikyon bearing that city's initial, sigma (Σ). He reportedly said, 'these sigmas will deceive you, men of Argos, into coming to fight us' (*Hell.* 4.4.10; cf. Arist. *NE* 1117a). Here, for Xenophon, was good Spartan strategy.

Athens, Sparta's enduring rival and enemy, generated remarks about Spartan duplicity, such as the comic reference about Spartans being 'little foxes ... with treacherous souls, treacherous minds' (Aristophanes, *Peace* 1067–8). Of course an enemy will say such things, not least because an enemy is commonly a target for deceit, in diplomacy as in war. But Herodotos, a non-Athenian and not disrespectful of Sparta which he had personally visited (3.55), nevertheless writes that Athenians 'knew' that the Spartans tended 'to say one thing and think another' (9.54). Thucydides, in reporting the words of leading men in the Peloponnesian War, regularly depicts without comment their distortion of the truth, their spin. But only once does he say explicitly that someone was 'speaking untruth' – and that was of the Spartan Brasidas (4.108.5 with 85.7). In later times, lying became a quality in the stereotypical idea of Sparta. When Spartan culture was criticized as mendacious, a Spartan supposedly replied: 'That's right. We are free men. But if anyone else does not tell the truth, he will live to regret it' (Plut. *Mor.* 234 f., cf. 229a).

Because lying is widespread in many cultures, and especially between rivals and enemies, we may hesitate to pay attention to the view of other Greeks that Spartans were especially given to uttering systematic untruth. In our own times, we have learned especially to beware of anything that looks like a negative ethnic stereotype. But our modern manners may disarm us in the face of Sparta. Efficient lying may not have been seen by Spartans as negative. It was apparently something that they prided themselves upon; witness Xenophon's approving remarks above. Thucydides' account of how the 2000 impressive helots were identified and massacred in secrecy may have reached him, highly sensitive information though it was, because some Spartans boasted of their efficient deception. As to ethnic stereotyping: Spartan society was structured to produce a stereotype – of themselves. Spartans were, they themselves insisted, the *homoioi*, the 'similars' (e.g. Xen. *Hell.* 3.3.5, *Lak. Pol.* 10.7; 13.1). The young were educated in a single compulsory system, adults were aggregated away from their families, so as to be 'typed', stamped and moulded in a common culture. We have no reason to suppose that cultures will not differ sometimes as regards truth-telling. (In nineteenth-century England, an important motive in the reform of the elite Public Schools was a desire to eradicate a culture of lying to authority: see this work, [Chapter](#)

29). Modern scholars have disagreed as to how militarized Spartan culture was (see Hodkinson (2009a) and this volume, [Chapter 2](#)). But Sparta's special efficiency in military matters is the one aspect of her history about which we can be most certain.

It should be recognized that there need be nothing ethnic, in the sense of inborn, about a tendency to lie; it may be something generated by a culture of war. In English-speaking countries there is a commonplace saying that when war breaks out, truth is always the first casualty. There circulated in Germany, around the time of the First World War, a rhyme which may be especially useful in our own analysis of Sparta:

Kommt der Krieg ins Land,
Gibt's Lügen wie Sand.

When war enters the land,
Then lies are like sand.

The image of sand was chosen to suggest that lies were innumerable, but also, perhaps, that – like grains of sand – they could be scattered pervasively and be hard to get rid of. Lying, we should recall, is born of the same motive as secrecy: to withhold truth.

When Perikles, in Thucydides, describes Spartan secrecy, the term 'acts of deception' (*apatai*) is used of Sparta in the same sentence (2.39.1). Imitating the imagery of an early Greek poet (Hesiod), we might describe Mendacity as Secrecy's more enterprising sister. The English language also suggests that active deceit is allowable in a military context. In describing without disapproval a deliberately deceptive arrangement, as of furniture or shop goods, we say that things are 'strategically placed'. English, that is, uses the same word, with the same range of meaning, as did Xenophon in praising the deceitfulness of a Spartan king.

In approaching Spartan history, we may need to show a more suspicious caution than scholars have traditionally done. But that caution may liberate the historian, and make possible a sweeping new creativity. Knowing that we are likely to be offered lies of Spartan origin is not merely a recipe for scepticism. It may, surprisingly, lead us into new fields of reconstruction – by revealing areas where Spartans feared that the truth would damage them. There are, in two of our most important ancient sources for Sparta, Xenophon and Thucydides, certain internal tensions concerning access to the truth. Xenophon, as ally and client of Spartan authorities, tells enthusiastically of much that was unusually efficient about Spartan society. But for him one aspect of such efficiency, as we have seen, is Spartan deceptiveness. Should

we not suspect that his eulogy of Spartan efficiency was itself in some ways issued to deceive? In the work of Thucydides, where active partisanship of this kind is not easily imaginable, a more subtle paradox may be detected. Sparta, in his view, was secretive and hard to know. And yet several of his statements about Sparta amount, when carefully analysed, to a wide-ranging claim to knowledge – sometimes in intimate and sensitive matters.

Thucydides writes that Spartans had no experience in the matter of piracy and guerrilla warfare in their own territory (4.41.3). This amounts to a claim about many years of Spartan history, over many areas of the southern Peloponnese. He makes his claim at a point when such warfare did come to trouble the Spartans, and when Athens happened to know – because Athenian troops had landed in Spartan territory and were deliberately provoking such trouble. And at this point he also notes that two boats manned by Messenian pirates, runaway Spartan helots that is (or just possibly their exiled kin from Naupaktos in the Corinthian Gulf), ‘happened’ to be present to threaten Sparta’s territory (4.9.1, cf. 53.3). Of an earlier episode, the death of the Spartan regent Pausanias, Thucydides writes that the ‘established Spartan procedure [*tropos*, in Greek] was not to punish irreversibly [i.e., to put to death] one of their own citizens without absolute proof’ (1.132.5). How did he know about Spartan custom (that is, behaviour over a long period), in such an intimate and embarrassing matter? Similarly, Spartans later became infuriated (in 418) with their king Agis, threatening to punish him by demolishing his house and imposing a colossal fine. Thucydides states that this was ‘contrary to their normal way of proceeding [*tropos*, again]’ (5.63.2). Agis survived, but the Spartans imposed on him a council of ten ‘advisors’, ‘a practice they had never previously had’ (5.63.4). How did Thucydides think that the secretive nature, as he described it elsewhere, of Sparta’s political system, allowed him to know how Spartans normally – that is, over a long period – reacted to a supposedly deviant king, and that ‘advisors’ to a king had during *all* previous periods been unknown? Where did he think he was getting his information, if not from Spartans? In the same year, Spartan troops became disorientated and scared on a battlefield. Thucydides’ account of this is especially revealing. He writes, ‘At this moment, the Spartans experienced a panic worse than any that they themselves could remember’ (5.66.1–2). Again, something lamentable for Spartans is described, and alongside the description of the particular case is given a general denial that such had ever happened before, over a long period. But this time, most helpfully, Thucydides reveals that his source for this grand denial was the Spartans.

These cases of allegedly exceptional Spartan behaviour have interesting things in common. They all concern areas of Spartan vulnerability, which an enemy such as Athens might find it helpful to know. Sparta had an intense awareness of the principle that one state’s weakness was an opponent’s opportunity. The timing of her military expeditions abroad reveals this; see

[Chapter 11](#) in this volume. (And Thucydides, even when in exile, would be known to the Spartans as a former Athenian general who had campaigned against them, might do so again, and certainly might talk to others who would.) Again, all of these cases of Spartan weakness were indeed unusual – but not, perhaps, in the way that the Spartans might claim. They were unusual because the Athenians obviously knew about them. Athenians witnessed guerrilla warfare within Spartan territory, as we have seen. Athenians would know about the sudden and permanent disappearance of regent Pausanias, earlier the victorious commander against the Persians at Plataia, and a familiar if disliked figure on Greek territory outside Sparta. Scandal about his death would predictably arise abroad. Similarly with the general Spartan outrage against king Agis (soon afterwards to be the personal enemy of the Athenian politician and general Alkibiades, who spent time in exile at Sparta). And Sparta's disorientation on the battlefield in 418 would be witnessed by its opponents there, including Athenians (5.67.2). In such cases Spartans would know that mere secrecy, simply to say nothing, would not do. Nor would denial of the particular case. Rather, it may seem that Spartans reacted in a way familiar today when an individual is caught in an embarrassing situation: by claiming in effect, 'We don't *normally* do this kind of thing.'

Statements from Thucydides and others about Sparta's norms may therefore help us to identify Sparta's real sensitivities. Was helot insurrection a lot more common, and therefore exploitable by an outside enemy, than Spartans liked to admit? Was that why young Spartan males were themselves taught guerrilla tactics, to live hidden in a landscape in a way which has nothing obvious to do with the requirements of classic hoplite warfare? Were Spartan citizens put to death more readily and often than the Spartan authorities liked to admit? We hear – but not from the contemporary Xenophon – that even citizen women of Sparta were put to death for political reasons in the early fourth century (Athenaeus 609b). It might help an enemy to know that Spartan society was far from an unshakeably solid team of 'similars'. Were kings, in particular, the source of deep political division? We shall see, in [Chapter 11](#), that well over half of Sparta's royal rulers in the period 500–371 were either put to death or exiled or threatened with such punishment. As for disorientation on the battlefield in 418, unique so far as Spartans 'remembered', we think of the despair and surrender of the entire Spartan force on the isle of Sphakteria just seven years earlier, in 425. At that point, Sparta's soldiers surrendered, attacked by missiles arriving through smoke. Sparta's reputation for correct orientation and manoeuvring on the battlefield was a precious military and political asset, useful for demoralizing the opponent. Xenophon, in his way, would try to protect it when writing his *Constitution of the Spartans*. He there wrote that for hoplites, amid confusion on the battlefield, to create a successful formation with whichever comrades they found next to them was not easy 'except for those educated under the laws of Lykourgos' (*Lak. Pol.* 11.7). Sparta's opponents, perhaps, should not even try. We see why the

Spartans themselves might wish to propagate a view of history in which Spartan troops (unlike others) almost never lost their formation or their morale.

Once we are sensitized to Spartan claims of the form ‘We don't have a general problem in such-and-such area. What happened was ... quite untypical of us’, we may set off to explore Spartan history in a new way. When, for example, Herodotos writes that Sparta prospered militarily during the reign of kings Leon and Agasikles except for a *single* defeat, against the Arkadian state of Tegea (1.65.1), we should be sceptical. What happened to Sparta and its political system in the archaic period is an important mystery. We should like to know much more of how Sparta had come to earn its position as the chosen military leader of the coalition against Persia in 480. Thucydides was to state, as we have seen, that Sparta owed its effectiveness in foreign affairs to its internal peace, its avoidance of faction and revolutionary pressure. His claim that this happy state of affairs had lasted ‘slightly more than 400 years, approximately’ has guided modern scholars. It has been common to assign the beginning of Sparta’s famous ‘austere’ constitution to the seventh century BC (as did de Ste. Croix (1972) 89–91) or even earlier. If this is correct, Sparta’s male citizens may have consisted for three or more centuries, from the early archaic period down to the late fourth century, of the ‘similars’: males inspired by laws ascribed to Lykourgos, educated in childhood under a severe and levelling discipline, feeding together as adults on unappetizing food and little wine, forbidden to make flashy displays of private wealth but instead ‘wearing clothes that even a poor man could afford’ (Arist. *Pol.* 1294b), and trained above all to offer their lives for Sparta in battle. This is a tempting picture. It may possibly be right: its credibility is examined below by Van Wees ([Chapter 8](#)). Certainly this picture would explain how Sparta by the end of the sixth century might be superior militarily to other, more physically relaxed, Greek states.

However, Thucydides’ grand claim about Sparta’s ancient, undisturbed internal polity is at odds with his own normal method. The discrepancy is even more marked than in the case of the other broad statements which he made about the Spartan past, statements themselves in tension with his own view that Sparta’s internal arrangements were traditionally obscured by secrecy. For Thucydides, when explaining his choice of the Peloponnesian War as subject matter for his history, stated that Greek history generally of more than a few years earlier than 431 was ‘impossible to discover with certainty because of the passage of so much time’ (1.1.3). As one of the best modern commentators on Thucydides observed, reluctantly, this ‘must mean, both in language and logic, “Greek history before the Peloponnesian War”, the whole of it’ (Gomme (1945) 91). How did Thucydides come to believe that, in the case of Sparta, whose internal history he thought to be *more* obscure than that of other states, he could go back ‘slightly more than 400

years, approximately'? It seems that he was willing to trust what he respectfully referred to elsewhere as 'the memory of the Spartans'. For information about other states, Thucydides noted that his sources often contradicted each other (1.22.3); this evidently and rightly put him on his guard. We should speculate as to whether the Spartan 'similars', in contrast, had learned a 'party line' about the vast antiquity of their own political system, so that when faced with Spartan informants the historian was disarmed by their unanimity.

1.3 Spartan Storytelling

In the dark history of secretive Sparta, there are some isolated and surprising pools of intense light and detail. Herodotos, Thucydides, Xenophon and other writers tell circumstantial stories of certain events in Spartan history. These stories tend to be moralizing, with clearly defined heroes and villains. They also tend to focus on the manner of death. And they are extraordinarily memorable, with much use of visual detail. Herodotos, for example, describes the bad death of the disgraced king Kleomenes (*c.*490). After being exiled, and reportedly organizing anti-Spartan activity among Sparta's neighbours, this king was recalled to Sparta. There – with suspicious promptness – he went mad, assaulted the faces of fellow Spartans with a rod, was confined, but managed to kill himself by long incisions into his own flesh (Hdt.6.74–5). Kleomenes' successor, Leonidas, was deemed to have had a good death. We hear enough from Herodotos about the courageous deeds of him and his 300 Spartans, against the Persians at Thermopylai (480), to form the basis of modern films. Leonidas' co-king, from the other – parallel – royal house, was Leotychidas. His bad end (though not his death, in exile) is similarly graphic. He was, according to Herodotos, bribed by Thessalians not to press home his campaign against their pro-Persian regime. He was caught red-handed in corruption, attempting to hide – by sitting on it – a sleeve of Persian style stuffed with silver (Hdt.6.72). At the same period, the regent Pausanias who represented the Agiad royal house after Leonidas, and who – like Leotychidas – commanded in a victorious battle against the Persians (Pausanias at Plataia in central Greece, Leotychidas at Mykale in the eastern Aegean) himself came to a picturesque bad end. Pausanias was convicted of the worst offences imaginable against his own city and against Greece generally: conspiring with his former opponent, Persia, to impose Persian rule on Greece, and plotting with the helots to overthrow the rule of the 'similars' at Sparta. We read of him convicting himself in a conversation he thought secret, but which was being overheard by other Spartan authorities, ephors, hidden behind a screen. When, a little later, the ephors duly came to arrest him, one of them through favour gave a barely visible nod of the head to Pausanias to warn him of what

was about to happen. He escaped to sanctuary on holy ground, and was starved almost to death. But, when he was about to die, the authorities carried him out, still breathing (*emphous*, in Greek). Thus he died, in a way (we are to infer) that avoided causing religious pollution to a shrine which might enduringly affect the whole community.

This tale about the end of Pausanias is told at remarkable length in the Greek. And it is told not by Herodotos, the 'Father of History' and a prince of storytelling. Pausanias' end is narrated by the austere Thucydides (1.128–34). Again, this information about Sparta seems contrary to Thucydides' normal method. Storytelling elements (*to mythōdes*) would scarcely be found in his history, Thucydides had announced (1.22.4). But the picturesque is well represented in this story, with such details as the lurking ephors and the 'barely visible' nod; the text of a treasonable letter from Pausanias proposing to marry the king of Persia's daughter; and Pausanias confronted by an outraged former boyfriend. For Thucydides to have trusted such a lively tale, concerning a period (c.470) eminently affected by 'the passage of time', he is likely to have been sure that its (ultimate) source was Spartan. In moralizing, visually, about the end of a royal ruler the story is part of a set. And there is one detail above all which suggests Spartan handiwork. The Spartan commander who fought with the most distinguished bravery in Thucydides' own time was Brasidas, who was killed in battle in 422. Thucydides, as Athenian general, had earlier campaigned against Brasidas, and his respect for this Spartan opponent is obvious. Now, Brasidas died after planning a highly successful military engagement in northern Greece, one in which some 600 were killed on the Athenian side and only seven on the Spartan. That Brasidas himself was one of those few Spartan casualties told its own story; he had led bravely from the front. But Thucydides emphasizes the exact timing of his death. He died shortly after hearing that his men were victorious (5.10.11). The possible moralizing element is clear. Virtue had some reward; the story avoids the frustrating possibility that Brasidas died without realizing how gloriously he had succeeded. Spartans would be the ones to know exactly when the wounded Brasidas died, and what he knew before that point. And the word Thucydides uses to describe Brasidas when news of the victory was known is *emphous*, the same word which had been used of regent Pausanias, in that case too to make the moral point that, through the timing of the death, the worst had been avoided.

Our other contemporary source for extensive detail about classical Sparta is Xenophon. He too has moralizing tales of soldierly deaths, at times with a certain – morally positive – reference to relations between Spartan soldiers and their boyfriends. Pasimakhos and his men took up their famous and deceptive Sikyonian shields to fight, heavily outnumbered, as hoplites; and in the process Pasimakhos died. Although cavalrymen up to that point, they deliberately left behind the horses which could have saved them (*Hell*.

4.4.10). A group of Spartan imperial officials, commanded by one Anaxibios, finding themselves in a fatal position on the battlefield, sent away their (non-Spartan) allies but preferred to stand their own ground and die – accompanied by Anaxibios' boyfriend, himself faithful to the end (*Hell.* 4.8.38–9).

Xenophon claims to report the noble words of Anaxibios, as he foresees his own death. Since Xenophon also strongly suggests that all present, both steadfast Spartans and the allies who were permitted to flee, were promptly killed, we wonder how Xenophon thought he knew Anaxibios' words. The question recalls the Thermopylai narrative. Of Thermopylai, too, we are told that Leonidas sent away Greek allies as defeat became highly probable (*Hdt.* 7.220–2). It may even be that an idealizing, false tale about Leonidas was now, almost a century later, generating real suicidal bravery through imitation. If so, that may be exactly what the Spartans intended by their myth-making. The son of Xenophon's revered patron, king Agesilaos, had a boyfriend of his own, who later died in battle in good Spartan fashion. That death, Xenophon notes approvingly, while paining Agesilaos' son to the limit, brought on him an important reflected glory (*Hell.* 5.4.33): he had chosen – or formed – the boyfriend as a soldier of good character.

1.4 Constructing History from Spartan Propaganda

Patterns, even genres, of Spartan manipulative communication are becoming clear. We find moralizing anecdotes especially about death; staged visual events (such as the celebrations after falsified news of victories, and of helot liberation; the dressing to suggest poverty); sweeping claims of undisturbed political and military excellence over long periods. Propaganda such as this may, however, prove more revealing than its authors realize. It tends to make clear which *values* are most important to those issuing the propaganda. And the origin of values is – history. It is worth first summarizing Spartan values as revealed in the examples of propaganda mentioned above. Most obviously, in calling themselves the 'similars', Spartans displayed their preference for the conformist over the impressive eccentric. Private wealth was not to be advertised. The individual 'similar' had to be ready to die for the community, but only as carrying out collective activity as ordered. Warfare was best carried out calmly: combing hair was at the virtuous extreme, panic at the other. Disloyalty in leaders was to be punished with exceptional severity in life, and by enduringly ignominious anecdotes after it. Among the homosocial similars, homosexual liaisons had positive value.

Ideals, as often, are a key to history. In our personal lives, we understand reflexively what is likely to have happened when an ideal is expressed. If we

hear ‘Big boys don’t cry!’, we commonly and rightly suppose that a boy has been crying, or threatening to do so. The American electoral slogan ‘Yes we can!’ reveals a widespread pre-existent fear that, in fact, No, we can’t. This cognitive habit should be applied more widely – in writing history. Modern Europe shows the principle clearly. In Britain, what may seem to be mindless gloating in patriotic song, ‘Rule Britannia, Britannia rules the waves’, is revealed as originally something very different in the song’s next line: ‘Britons never, never, never, shall be slaves’. There, plainly, is the fear of foreign invasion. The names of prominent concourses in capital cities are especially revealing. ‘Trafalgar Square’ in London refers again to the fear of foreign invasion. On the other hand, in modern Greece, where revolutions and civil war have made internal stability a lively aspiration, ‘The Constitution’ is an emotive ideal: whence the names of ‘Syntagma’ (‘Constitution Square’) at the heart of Athens, in front of the Parliament building (formerly the royal palace), and of ‘Omonoia’, ‘Harmony Square’, close by. Modern France likewise has its ‘Harmony Square’, La Place de la Concorde, similarly reflecting a terror of internal disharmony. Here had occurred the extreme of discord: the square was the site of the main guillotine, where Louis XVI and his court were decapitated amid public celebration. A citizen who prominently advertised the ideals of the French Revolution, by naming himself ‘Philippe Egalité’, ‘Equality Philip’, was in fact senior royalty, and one of the richest men in France: the Duke of Orleans. The Duke’s Equality may be logically quite close to Spartan Similarity. Sparta’s fears, too, and thus Sparta’s history, are there to be discovered in her own propaganda.

Sparta’s ideals of military courage and discipline: what may they reveal? Perhaps the likeliest time for the beginning of Sparta’s famous, austere regime and way of life was the second half of the sixth century; see especially Van Wees (in the present work, [Chapters 8 and 9](#)). And that period followed a Spartan defeat (by neighbouring Tegea), and a surrender so resounding that Spartan secrecy could not efface it (Hdt.1.66). In the fifth century, as we have seen, Spartan troops surrendered to the Athenians in 425, on the island of Sphakteria. Shortly afterwards, the Spartan authorities are described by Thucydides as being in panic (4.55.3–4). They evidently had reason to fear that the highest military standards would *not* be maintained. And for Sparta the need for military efficiency was even more obvious than for other major Greek states. The matter is put graphically by Xenophon, describing another panic in Spartan ruling circles (in 399 or thereabouts). An insecure new Spartan king, Agesilaos, claimed to have uncovered a plot in which Sparta’s domestic subjects and political inferiors – helots, free *perioikoi* (‘Dwellers around’, on whom see Ducat, this work, [Chapter 23](#)) and other out-groups – were reportedly conspiring, with their overwhelming numbers, to set upon the Spartan citizenry. Xenophon reports a Spartan soothsayer, working with Agesilaos, as saying that the omens ‘suggest we are already surrounded by enemies’, men who would be willing to ‘eat the Spartans even raw’ (*Hell.*

3.3.4, 6). Even in their homeland, Spartans could not take their military security for granted.

Sparta's claim to 'Similarity' is likewise rewarding to explore against the grain. If similarity is a prominent ideal, a major problem, as perceived, must be – variety. We can detect several forms of variety which particularly troubled the Spartans. The two royal houses apparently survived from a time before austere official levelling was imposed. Their privileges provoked discomfort amid a culture of similarity. Kings acted, unless too young (or in exile), as 'hereditary generals for life', in Aristotle's phrase (*Pol.* 1285b). Their domestic influence, like their wealth, could also be very large. Paul Cartledge's work *Agisilaos and the Crisis of Sparta* (1987), now the great handbook of intimate detail about Spartan politics and society, analyses the leadership, military and political, of the king who dominated Spartan policy for some forty years (c.400–359). At the death of a king, all classes of the population of Spartan territory were represented at a clamorous funeral (Hdt.6.58–60), which celebrated the dead man so effusively that even the usually loyal Xenophon seems to complain. He states that such reverence appears to be greater than any mortal deserved (*Hell.* 3.3.1). Mourners cried out that the dead king was the best king yet. But funerals are in many cultures a time of extreme idealization. The classic expression of this is in Latin: *De mortuis nil nisi bonum* ('[Say] only good things about the [recent] dead'), though the original idea was attributed in Antiquity to a Spartan reformer of the sixth century BC, Chilon (Diog. Laert. 1.3.70). If excessive claims about a dead king were necessary, it was in part because so many royal rulers were, in their lifetimes, passionately contested at Sparta. Some were exiled under threat of a worse fate: Damaratos, Leotychidas and Pleistoanax in the fifth century, and Pausanias in the fourth. Others were killed at Sparta: regent Pausanias, and probably Kleomenes I before him. Classical Sparta was, in this limited respect, one of the most unstable Greek states of the classical period. (In Hellenistic Sparta, when the austere constitution survived mainly as an aspiration or a set of outward forms, not only was a king put to death – Agis IV in 241 – but his mother and grandmother were executed at the same time.)

'Similarity' was also a problematic ideal in respect of citizens' private wealth. Alone of Greek states, perhaps, Sparta abolished not only public drunkenness, as at festivals, but also the *symposion* ('drinking together'), the private – frequently aristocratic, exclusive and luxurious – drinking party around which so much of surviving Greek literary culture is constructed. To replace it, Sparta invented the *syssition* ('eating together'), where all male citizens were included, to eat and drink in moderation. The distinctive term 'syssition' signalled to Spartans an ideal of commonality. To us it signals also a problem (of provocative inequality) which Sparta had to exert herself to avoid. The wearing of uniformly modest clothes was similarly a way of palliating an awkward fact: some were far wealthier than others. Indeed, while some

Spartans were rich by any Greek standards, many other citizens of Sparta were threatened with demotion from citizen status, simply on grounds of insufficient wealth. If a man was unable to make the standard contribution towards the dining groups, the *syssitia*, he ceased to be a Spartiate and became an Inferior. Aristotle made an intense criticism of Sparta for allowing wealth to concentrate in a few families, and the citizen body to become so small. In his view, Sparta perished as a great power through shortage of (citizen) population, *oliganthrōpia* (*Pol.* 1270a). In addition to levelling dress, Spartans devised other ways of avoiding friction between rich and poor, such as the provision of extra food by the wealthy for sharing at their *syssitia*. Stephen Hodkinson's book *Property and Wealth in Classical Sparta* (2000) illuminates the many ways in which inequalities of wealth were addressed by – or defeated – the Spartan system. The name ‘Similar’ not only reflected a grave problem of dissimilarity; it was also, like levelling *syssitia* and dress, a device to address the problem, to calm resentments by assuring less wealthy citizens that their status was comparable with that of the grandest.

The ideal of Similarity responded to other fears. In most Greek states, Xenophon makes clear, *symposia* reflected and promoted social division by age. The young had parties with the young, the old with the old (*Lak. Pol.* 5.5). Generation gaps tended to lead to political tensions and even revolution. The point was perhaps even clearer in ancient Greece than in the modern world: a standard Greek word for ‘revolution’, *neōterismos*, recalled, if indeed it did not reflect, the standard word for the young, *neoi*: revolution might be seen as a young man's affair. Sparta's *syssitia*, Xenophon suggests, involved men of all ages dining together. Families (as Plato complained, *Laws* 788a–b) were a particularly fertile source of variety in citizens. We find, in keeping with the ideal of similarity, that measures were taken at Sparta to restrict the time husbands and wives spent together; couples were not to develop their own cultures. Parental culture, in its diversity, was one reason why Sparta made schooling together compulsory for the children of citizens. Another source of diversity was even more to be feared. Spartan estates, in Laconia and Messenia, were scattered over huge distances. And in those territories Spartan citizens were outnumbered many times over by *perioikoi*, various Inferiors, and above all by helots. Unless compelled to come together to school, many Spartiate children would have tended to find playmates of inferior status and thereby to assimilate with them. That was decidedly not the kind of Similarity which Spartiate parents wished for (see this work, [Chapter 29](#)). The word ‘Similar’ hid a presupposition (‘Similar to whom?’), rather like the British term for elite speech, ‘Received Pronunciation’ (Received by whom?). At Sparta, as elsewhere, the important thing was to be similar to the right people.

We have already noted several ancient references – chiefly from Xenophon – to homosexual couples among Spartan men. Xenophon suggests approval in

particular cases, but also is explicit in commending the social value for Spartans of youthful couples, in which a young man might effectively educate a youth for whom he had strong feelings. Sparta's lawgiver Lykourgos, we are told, approved – provided there was no copulation or obvious lust (*Lak. Pol.* 2.13). This form of Spartan sociability has been well explored by modern scholars, and especially by Paul Cartledge ((1981) and (1987)). Modern values may, however, tend to obscure the full significance of same-sex relationships in Sparta. In western liberal discourse of recent times, the tendency has been to *defend* (against conservative pressures within our own societies) the rights of adult homosexual couples, but not usually to advocate homosexuality as an ideal for all or most. In Sparta, things may have been different, with a certain form of male homosexuality positively promoted as of general utility. Now, if we miss this difference, we may miss also the need to ask: if more homosexuality was seen as an ideal at Sparta, what was felt to be the problem to which the ideal responded?

If we do ask the above question, we can at last give proper value to a striking but undervalued passage of Aristotle on the sexuality of Spartans (*Pol.* 1269b). He wrote, in the second half of the fourth century, that Spartan male citizens were excessively influenced by females. Using a term of which the power can be sensed even by those who do not read Greek, Aristotle described the men of Sparta as *gynaikokratoumenoi*: 'under the rule of women'. And the reason, Aristotle suggests, is lust in men, of the heterosexual kind. As he graphically puts it: Homer was right to portray Ares, the god of war, as passionately and adulterously attached to Aphrodite, goddess of sex. Soldierly Spartans were correspondingly, excessively, drawn to their own women, for sexual reasons. Aristotle makes a wide-ranging and seemingly passionate argument for the idea that women had a destructive effect on imperial Sparta. We should be a little cautious of possible over-enthusiasm on his part, as he (in his own phrase, used elsewhere) *defends a thesis*. But as a profoundly intelligent – and near-contemporary – commentator on the last decades of Spartan hegemony, his evidence cannot be dismissed. If we see male homosexual passion at Sparta as *normative* (that is, the ideal, commonly practised) rather than as the *normal* (that is, the numerically predominant) form of sexuality, we may again identify an influential form of Spartan fear: fear of female influence over what was meant to be a soldierly, homosocial, society of men, in harmony with each other rather more than with their women.

By understanding Sparta's ideals as the reaction to her fears, the grandest ideal of all may be illuminated. This is the claim that the Spartan political system had been stable for 'slightly more than 400 years, approximately'. We have already seen reason to think it probable that Thucydides accepted this claim from the Spartans themselves. There is a further, more direct, indication that the Spartans thought in this way. Early in the Peloponnesian War (c.427),

Pleistoanax, a Spartan king long exiled in disgrace, was allowed to return. His return was marked by ceremonies, employing 'the same choruses and sacrifices as when they first established the kings at the foundation of Lakadaimon' (5.16.3). Now, Spartans and Greeks generally would have understood by this a period far more remote even than the start of the 'slightly more than 400 years, approximately', which Thucydides wrote of in describing Sparta's enduring constitution. A period, that of the foundation of Sparta, which for us is the darkest of dark ages, was one which Sparta told a detailed story about. What was to be gained by exaggerating continuity? Plato in the *Laws* (798a–c), almost certainly with Sparta in mind, is clear and convincing. This, he says, is a matter of such political importance that the citizens of his ideal state must be firmly guided away from the truth: they must have no idea that, in their city, any political system other than the present, correct one has ever existed. Faced with a system of vast longevity, they will assume all revolution to be impractical. Conversely, knowledge of an *ancien régime* successfully overthrown encourages (as in modern France) thoughts of new constitutions for the future. We have already seen signs that the Spartans were, in reality, nervous about the stability of their regime. Regent Pausanias was accused of plotting subversion with the helots. King Agesilaos played on fears of insurrection concerning an alleged plot among out-groups willing to 'eat' the Spartans. But the most telling single act, in this respect, is the decision of the Spartan authorities to exclude from all official posts those citizens who had surrendered to Athens on Sphakteria and who, in 421, had been allowed to return to Sparta (Thuc. 5.34.2). The authorities, Thucydides states, acted from fear that this group, some 120 men, would become revolutionaries.

Of what revolutionary tendency, more precisely, were the Spartan authorities afraid? The returned prisoners-of-war from Sphakteria included a notable proportion of 'the first' Spartans, by which Thucydides (5.15.1) probably meant those with most prestige, wealth – and influential relatives. Here is evidence of significant *dissimilarity* among the citizen body. Sparta's ruling royalty, of whom in the period 500–395 a majority (seven out of eleven) were either killed, exiled or threatened with exile, were, of course, from the first of the first families. The fear most likely to have activated defenders of the regime was of a move towards restored aristocracy on familiar Greek lines, of a return to an easier and more privileged life for the very few, and of an end to the rigorous *Similarity* which aided the majority of citizens. The role of helots or *perioikoi* in such a move to aristocracy might be this: they would be offered liberation in return for acting as allies of the revolutionaries, against the conservative authorities of Sparta. In the fourth century, as Aristotle insisted, and no doubt earlier, the concentration of wealth in fewer and fewer Spartan hands was already tending in that direction. Hellenistic Sparta would take the process further, in spite of occasional attempts to restore the 'laws of Lykourgos'. The killing, in the third century, of king Agis IV and his female

relatives was carried out at the instigation of the wealthy, successfully resisting a royal attempt to bring back the austere constitution and the culture of Similarity. When, only a few years after Agis' death, another revolutionary king, Kleomenes III, himself tried to recreate a 'Lykourgan' regime, he made enormous grants of Spartan citizenship to *perioikoi* (Plutarch, *Kleomenes* 11.3), thus supplying himself with thousands of partisans to help overcome conservative resistance from powerful citizen opponents. By that period, the later part of the third century, conservatism at Sparta meant resistance to – rather than defence of – a 'Lykourgan' system: that much was the reverse of the pattern known in the classical period. But what may have remained constant was the principle whereby revolutionary citizens appealed to the helots or *perioikoi* for help against their own conservative fellow-citizens. The presence, in Sparta's home territories of Laconia and Messenia, of a vast reservoir of disaffected Greeks, the helots and some *perioikoi*, was surely a standing temptation to politically discontented Spartans looking for allies. All would know this. So long as these out-groups greatly outnumbered Spartan citizens, any Spartan regime had a great deal to be afraid of.

It is reasonable to suspect that the idea, in Thucydides' day, of a Spartan constitution more than 400 years old was a grand falsehood, propagated to foreign enemies, to helots, and quite likely to Spartans themselves to reduce the prospect of regime change engineered from without, or aristocratic revolution inspired from within. We have seen, in the case of military defeats, that Spartans were not averse to being lied to, in what they considered a good cause. Along with this ideal of a political system stable for centuries, the associated fear which we should infer, is in fact displayed with remarkable clarity. Both Herodotos and Thucydides write of Sparta's long-lived stability. And each of them, in the very passage where he does so, makes a dramatic comment about how *bad* had been the political instability before the revolutionary change to stability occurred. Both write of extreme *stasis* in this early Sparta. Herodotos writes that the Spartans in their internal affairs had been 'almost the most unruly of all Greeks' (1.65.2). Thucydides says that Sparta's internal conflicts had been 'the most enduring of any state he knew' (1.18.1). Once more, how would Thucydides think he knew of these remote horrors, from *much* more than the 'four centuries' earlier, unless the Spartans had told him of how dreadful things were before the coming of their famous austere constitution?

Scepticism about the longevity of Sparta's system should, therefore, arise from analysis of literary texts. But there is other, picturesque, evidence of a Sparta in the sixth century living in a style very different from that associated with Lykourgos. For some fifty years in that century, vase painters in Laconia – Sparta's heartland – produced figurative scenes showing wealthy men indulging themselves in a traditional Greek style, albeit with some distinctive local features (Pipili (1987), Powell (1998)). This remarkable Laconian

pottery is analysed in this volume ([Chapter 5](#)) by Maria Pipili and, it should be admitted, her expert interpretation of the vases is, in important respects, not supportive of the political interpretation suggested here. In the vase paintings, elegantly dressed men are depicted reclining, not at austere *syssitia* but at relaxed *symposia*. One vase shows a large mixing bowl of wine, promising intoxication to the symposiasts. On another vase, lavishly dressed female musicians accompany the drinkers ([Chapter 5, Figure 5.3](#)). No doubt it was understood that by the end of the drinking, these young women might be in a rather different state of dress. (Athenian vases showing scenes of consummated debauchery at symposia are collected in Kilmer (1993).) Elsewhere a privileged young man poses on a fine horse ([Chapter 5, Figure 5.9](#)). On a small Laconian cup, other, less composed, young people (probably men rather than women) are shown naked, pursued, whipped and penetrated by what seem to be older citizens stylishly dressed. (For sketches of this indelicate scene, Pipili (1987) 66, fig. 95; Powell (1998) 131.) These vases, even now, survive in considerable numbers. In the sixth century there was evidently a conspicuous industry in Laconia producing them, even though on a scale much smaller than for Attic vase painting. There is little doubt about the period to which these Laconian vases belong. One vase depicts – and names – a Greek king of Cyrene, Arkesilas, as he supervises the shipping of exports. Whether this is Arkesilas I or (as usually thought) Arkesilas II, the date of the vase is not far from the 570s. The culture implied by these vases is utterly unlike the iron puritanism attributed to Lykourgos. Here is extreme display of wealth and physical self-indulgence. These vases are still somewhat undervalued by historians – perhaps because they confuse the traditional narrative of a Lykourgan regime going back for centuries. How should we interpret them?

To protect traditional chronology, scholars have sometimes suggested that these vases had nothing, or nothing much, to do with the Spartiates. The strongest point in favour of this idea is that relatively few of these Laconian vases are found in Laconia; most of the finds are from abroad, notably from the territory of Samos, in the eastern Aegean. May they not have been produced in Laconia by non-Spartiate craftsmen, distributed by business people also of non-Spartiate status and, as Pipili argues in this volume, designed to appeal to the tastes and *mores* of Greeks far from Sparta? Attention has turned to the *perioikoi*, citizens of neighbouring communities, outside Sparta. Were they responsible for this artistic portrayal of opulent living? The idea cannot be disproved. But much seems to tell against it. The *perioikoi*, when we have a little detailed information about them, in the fifth century and later, mostly behave as loyal allies of Sparta. Few of them revolted, even when given a good opportunity, as during the 460s when Sparta itself was laid low by a major earthquake and helots in large numbers defected. *Perioikoi*, indeed, would be integrated en masse into the ranks of the Spartan army in the fifth century; they were, at least from that period onwards,

intimate if not trusted allies. Would the *perioikoi* have systematically propagated images celebrating precisely the aristocratic lifestyle that the Lykourgan culture was constructed to resist? We do not know that the *perioikoi* themselves had the wealth to sustain an elite with the sort of lavish tastes reflected on the vases. The Spartans, the ultimate masters of Laconia and Messenia, presumably had most of the best land. If Sparta in the mid-sixth century had been run on Lykourgan lines, with the *perioikoi* mostly loyal to Sparta, living on marginal land and far from wealthy, it is difficult – though not impossible – to think of *perioikoi* drawing their images of aristocratic fun-and-games from far away, and then selling a version of those images back to remote Greek communities which appreciated such things. A successful export trade commonly needs a local market to sustain it, and indeed initially to generate it. Also, how would the Spartans, if they were already under an austere regime, have felt about their *perioikoi* spreading images of extreme aristocratic indulgence around the Greek world? It was a characteristic of classical Sparta to project abroad an austere picture of itself: images of inflexible, indomitable Sparta were an important instrument of war.

The important fact that only a minority of the Laconian vases have so far been found in Laconia may have other explanations. The site of ancient Sparta now lies largely under the modern town of Sparti, and is not easy to excavate. In Antiquity, Spartans of the austere period, if that began (say) in the late sixth century, may have contributed to purging the politically incorrect images from earlier times. One particular detail may be telling. Some Laconian vases of non-Lykourgan inspiration *have* been found at Sparta. Among them is (for us, at least) the most provocative of all: the one showing whipping and penetration of young people by a relaxed elite. The vase (now displayed, with some reluctance, in the Museum of Sparti), was found at the shrine of (Artemis) Orthia, a principal site of Spartan cult. That same site would become the venue for public whipping of the young of a very different sort: the ordeals displaying persistence-amid-pain described by Xenophon (*Lak. Pol.* 2.9) in the classical period and by Plutarch (*Lyk.* 18) some five centuries later. Scholars agree that these whipping ordeals had changed in purpose between the times of Xenophon and Plutarch. What had been a militaristic lesson in physical courage was, in Plutarch's day, part of a touristic attraction, designed to impress visitors in an age when Sparta was part of the Roman Empire and had no wars of its own to fight. Should we posit a further change, at an earlier period? Had there perhaps been a previous way of whipping the young, for sexual pleasure, which had itself been associated with the shrine of Orthia in the Archaic Period (whence the vase deposited at the shrine)? This too could have changed its form as part of a changing political culture, rather as austere Sparta had converted indulgent *symposia* into disciplined *syssitia*. Public whipping of the young may have evolved as spectacular religious festivals often do, with changing times: converted, in this case, from a display of predatory aristocratic fun into a scene of rigorous, Lykourgan, morality.

These illustrated, and frequently elegant, vases with their scenes of aristocratic life may be of central importance for Spartan history. They strongly suggest, though do not quite prove, that Sparta, until about half a century before the Persian invasion and the defining moment of Thermopylai, was not ‘Spartan’ in the modern sense. It quite probably was a relaxed, possibly over-relaxed, aristocratic *polis* of a familiar Greek kind. But whereas other Greek *poleis* of the archaic period reacted against their aristocracy by installing a dictator, a *tyrannos* who repressed aristocracy in the name of the wider citizen population, Sparta instead empowered that population directly in a way designed to restrict aristocratic excess. The aristocratic Laconian vases may help us understand how the grand Spartan falsehood took hold, of an austere system stretching back undisturbed for hundreds of years. That story was told, insistently and consistently, because Spartans sensed and feared the opposite. In reality, the old regime with its exceptionally bad *stasis*, was alarmingly close. What had ceased only a few generations back, might well return.

Spartans have been repeatedly criticized for stupidity – in modern times. Even de Ste. Croix may have suggested irrationality in the Spartans when he (famously) compared them to a dragon of Germanic myth, living a ‘nasty’ life in a cave in order to protect its possessions ((1972) 91). An understanding of Spartan fears, and of how systematically Sparta reacted to them, may refute that idea. The Spartans from the late archaic period (or perhaps earlier) did indeed devise and adhere to a system which involved suffering, deprivation and effort for themselves, a combination which other Greeks called *ponos*. But that system was intelligently conceived to respond to their particular fears, the fear of things much worse than *ponos*, of humiliation by their own aristocracy, of being conquered and destroyed by their own helots. There remained, of course, much normal pleasure at Sparta, pleasures of company, sex, occasional good food and some wine, and especially of long and elaborate festivals, festivals so important that even soldiering had to take second place to them. But the distinctive pleasure which the Spartan system delivered to its members was less physical than moral. That itself may reflect intelligence, since much pleasure in other societies which is assumed to be sought for physical, ‘materialist’, reasons is in fact sought mainly for reasons of status.¹

The moral pleasure of Spartans involved being recognized, with some security, as people of important status. Intelligent Spartans may indeed have understood, as their critics have not, how fear – correctly and lucidly dealt with – had helped them to their revered standing. There was, we hear, in third-century Sparta, a temple dedicated to an unusual deity: Phobos, ‘Fear’. The reference, in Plutarch (*Kleomenes* 8), is incidental. There is no reason to suppose that the cult was first created at that period; it may well be older and from the classical period. Why worship Fear? How was Fear supposed to

contribute to Sparta? There may be a clue in a speech attributed by Thucydides to Brasidas, the most respected embodiment of Spartan physical courage (and strategic intelligence) from the late fifth century. Brasidas writes that soldierly efficiency – to repeat, his own quality, on which he spoke with authority – derived in part from *aiskhynē*, meaning the fear of incurring others' bad opinions (Thuc. 5.9.9). Fear of a kind, moral fear, may have been recognized by Spartans as a reason for their own success. The Sparta which created an austere life for itself, whether in the late sixth century or earlier, was not yet master even of the Peloponnese. Its members had no reason to suppose that their stressful arrangements, inspired by the fear of disaster, would one day lead to their supremacy in the Greek world. But Spartans would not be the last people in history to realize slowly, perhaps too gradually to feel much surprise, that defensive measures contrived to avoid utter disaster could lead to extreme success. Aristotle says that it was a commonplace among writers in the classical period, that 'the Spartans governed a large empire because they had been trained to face dangers': *Pol.* 1333b.

1.5 Sparta Abroad – and Exposed

The mysteries of Sparta's inner life can be *partly* penetrated by thinking hard about the propaganda she issued. But there are some things about Sparta which other Greeks could perceive for themselves, direct information for them – and good information for us. These were the things that Spartans did away from home, in the territory of other Greeks (or, sometimes, at sea), and thus were far harder to hide. How far does this relatively direct information confirm the picture we construct of Spartan culture and mentality?

Something which poses special problems for secretive and deceptive regimes is the death of their leaders. For such cannot be hidden for long. Because Sparta's kings were hereditary generals, very much on view when the main Spartan army took the field, accompanied by a host of Greek allies from other states, their disappearance from campaigns was significant, and would be quickly noticed. This may be part of the reason why we are informed of the fact – subversive though it was – that so many of Sparta's royal rulers came to a bad end, or came close to such. Sparta *had* to issue its own account of their disappearance from command, or of obvious limitations put on their command (like regent Pausanias, abruptly recalled to Sparta in the 470s, and king Agis II, hedged about with commissars in 418), or, of course, of their exile. On important subjects, human nature abhors a vacuum of information; rumour and propaganda occupy the void. A Spartan official version would be contrived, to restrict the field for enemies abroad to impose interesting explanations of their own.

The death rate of Spartan commanders on campaign was similarly impossible

to hide, even if Sparta had wished to. That death rate is impressively higher than for commanders of Athens, the other state for which we have most information. Athenian commanders may be put to death *after* a campaign, by a victorious enemy (as Nikias and Demosthenes at Syracuse in 413), or even by their own city (after Arginousai in 406). But they do not die fighting to the same extent as Spartans: Kleon, Brasidas' last Athenian opponent, is a rarity. Both of Sparta's most successful commanders of the late fifth century, Brasidas and Lysandros (Lysander), died fighting. So did the admirals Mindaros (in 410) and Kallikratidas at Arginousai. Likewise king Kleombrotos at the decisive battle of Leuktra (371). And we have already alluded to the occasion when a number of Spartan governors of the early fourth century reportedly chose to die fighting rather than to run away. Here, it seems, is confirmation that there was a special Spartan ethos, generated within Sparta, and imposing physical courage.

And Thermopylai? Is not that a textbook case of Spartan bravery unto death? Thermopylai, we should admit, is rather special. King Leonidas, there is no doubt, knowingly and thus bravely led his army into a situation of exceptional danger, and died there. But details of his last days are obscure. Thermopylai in modern times has indeed been used, and abused, in textbooks: see Stefan Rebenich's [Chapter 27](#) in this work, on the reception of Sparta in Germany. And the best textbook information, as of Spartans combing their hair before battle, or talking manfully of appreciating the 'shade' from a dark cloud of Persian arrows, seems to come from Spartans, through Herodotos. But the Spartans of this period did not issue textbooks. Or indeed any books. They issued propaganda. And after Thermopylai, especially immediately afterwards when the Persians were through the pass and attacking Athens, the need for reassuring propaganda was acute. The main public fact, available to all and undeniable, was that a small but significant Spartan force, its royal commander, and other allies under Spartan command, had been annihilated, with little obvious gain. A victorious Persian army was at hand, and Sparta's leadership of fractious Greek states was in need of argument in its support. The victories of Salamis, Plataia and Mykale were in the future, not yet predictable. Sparta had every reason to look for, and if necessary to create, a silver lining for the desperate information concerning Thermopylai. The most that could be extracted was, a claim that the resistance to Xerxes' uncountable host was long (lasting for more than two days, we are told) and thus intensely competent; maintained until death and thus supremely brave; and as focused as possible on Spartans (Herodotos tells that Leonidas sent away many of his Greek allies before the end). We sadly ask: Did, for example, these brave Spartans really stay fighting for days? The question is not simply one of bravery. The reason why the most physical among the modern contact sports are programmed for minutes and not days – rugby for eighty minutes, Australian Rules for eighty and American football for sixty, and all with intervals for rest – is that after those minutes even the fittest of athletes tend to

collapse.

It is of the essence of battles in which one side perishes to the last man that no one from that side lives to tell their side of the story. Two Spartans, however, did survive, sent away – it was said – by Leonidas near the end, one as a messenger the other because of an eye problem. Their subsequent treatment at Sparta was so harsh as to be suspicious. Both were abused and humiliated, publicly identified as cowards. We should suspect, given Sparta's skill at deception and myth-making, that this treatment was not performed mainly to create a moral example. Neither man had run away; both had obeyed orders. Was Sparta's reaction meant rather, by disgracing the two survivors, to destroy their *credit* as sources? Did they, in short, know too much, things reflecting normal humanity in Leonidas and his men which would have complicated and thus weakened the moral tale which Sparta needed? Herodotos says of one of them, Aristodamos, that no Spartan would *converse* (*dielegeto*) with him (7.231). We naturally understand that no one would *speak* to him; but was the main point rather that no Spartan should be *spoken to* by him? It may be that Sparta's most unusual achievement involving Thermopylai was to create a myth which would propel her own men to generally successful, if often fatal, bravery in the future.²

Thucydides' report that Sparta was secretive about its internal arrangements again seems to be confirmed by secrecy outside Spartan territory, detectable – in outline – by other Greeks. In enemy territory, Spartan commanders execute a striking number of their manoeuvres by night. This was Brasidas' method of surprising Athenian possessions in the north, such as the town of Amphipolis (424). Gylippos, Spartan general in charge of Syracuse's defence against Athens during 414–13, likewise carried out several attacks by night (most notably against Plemmyrion). In 390, after a Spartan force had suffered heavy losses near Corinth, its commander led it back to Sparta in such a way as to pass the towns which lay en route during, or close to, the times of darkness (Xen. *Hell.* 4.5.18), almost certainly so that other Greeks of the Peloponnese should not see, and draw lessons from, Sparta's new weakness. Herodotos reports that Sparta's army, when it left home in exceptional numbers to fight the Persians (479), passed through *its own* territory by night (9.10). Was this inconvenient practice chosen solely as training for night manoeuvres later, in enemy territory? Or was it in part to prevent the helots from understanding how large a proportion of Sparta's defenders was being withdrawn? Aristotle would later write of the helots, again in general, that 'they continually lie in wait, as it were, to exploit Sparta's misfortunes' (*Pol.* 1269a).

Sparta's secretive ways were revealed unforgettably by another device: the use of a simple code to encrypt military messages. No other Greek state of the period is recorded as routinely using written code. The wording of a Spartan message was written across successive loops of a long band of material wrapped round a stick of a certain width (perhaps even irregular?), a *skytalē*

of which only the Spartans authorities had a duplicate. If enemies intercepted the material, once detached from its original stick, it would – even if they recognized it for what it was – take a little while using trial and error before the cloth could be aligned correctly and the message read. Naive though the procedure sounds, Sparta would at least gain some time thereby – and timing in the field was something of which Sparta had an advanced appreciation. The *skytalē* system also made it less easy for a message to be falsified, as for example by the messenger or by someone with access to him. After a Spartan fleet, under admiral Mindaros, had suffered a defeat by Athens in 410, a despairing *skytalē* message home was intercepted and read gleefully at Athens. According to Xenophon (*Hell.* 1.1.23), it ran as follows: ‘The ships are lost. Mindaros is dead. The men are starving. We don't know what to do.’ The sensational impression which this revelation would have made, no doubt far beyond Athens, would have helped to spread a lively interest in Sparta’s secretive methods.

Sparta’s nocturnal manoeuvres were designed to deny the enemy *sight* of what Sparta was doing (exactly as Perikles reportedly said, about the Spartans denying sight, *theama*, of what was militarily sensitive: Thuc. 2.39.1). Manipulating what the enemy – and others – saw was something which could also be done positively, by the deliberate creation of suggestive spectacles. These might be meant to invert the truth, as with the Spartans who deceived their enemy by carrying shields with the sign of Sikyon, or to accentuate the truth. Sparta’s troops, marching with their long hair and in scarlet cloaks, were surely meant to draw the enemy’s gaze and to let Sparta’s intimidating military reputation do its work. A Spartan force, at its best, ‘gave the impression of consisting entirely of bronze and scarlet’ (Xen. *Ages.* 2.7). Xenophon, who campaigned alongside Spartan officers, insists on the emphasis they put on what others, and they themselves, could *see*. The Spartan Cheirisophos, Xenophon's fellow commander on an expedition in unfamiliar Persian territory (401–00), is quoted as arguing repeatedly from what ‘you can see’. The Spartan king Agesilaos is described, again by Xenophon, as contriving an impressive military spectacle before his own planned assault on the Persian empire:

you could see the gymnasium full of men exercising, the hippodrome full of horsemen riding, the javelin throwers and the archers at target practice. He made the whole city something worth *seeing*. The market-place was full of armaments and horses for sale, while the bronze-smiths and [list of other craftsmen] were all preparing military equipment. As a result, you would truly have thought the city a workshop of war. *One would also have been fortified to see ...*

(*Ages.* I 26f.; *Hell.* 3.4.16–18).

The city where this display was mounted was Ephesos, in Asia Minor. But it

was at Sparta that Agesilaos had learned to use the visual to work on men's minds.

Xenophon, for so long Sparta's partisan, insists often on Sparta's difference in military matters. Here it is a Spartan spectacle of a 'workshop of war'. Elsewhere, as we have seen, he talks of battlefield manoeuvres which were not easy to learn 'unless one had been brought up under the laws of Lykourgos'. In another context he describes the military use of divination by Sparta: Spartans in this respect could be 'seen as the only true craftsmen of war'. Compared with them, all other armies would seem to be mere 'improvisers', making things up as they went along (*Lak. Pol.* 13.5). Xenophon insists so much – too much? This theme of Sparta's military superiority was perhaps itself part of Sparta's military superiority: effective propaganda as an instrument of war. We ourselves should insist on remembering that there was a lot more to Spartan life than preparation for war (Hodkinson, this volume, [Chapter 2](#)). But it is not only the pro-Spartan Xenophon who insists on Sparta's difference. Aristotle, who vigorously insisted that Sparta was not an ideal to be imitated, points out that after 370, after the loss of its hegemony and even of Messenia, Sparta was not a happy community (*Pol.* 1333b). Now, he writes, the Spartans no longer rule over others, and they lose battles (*Pol.* 1338b) because now they have rivals in the matter of (militaristic) training. For long the Spartans had no such rivals in education, and it was this singularity which gave them their rule over others.

The military (and political) principle of waiting for special opportunity was widely familiar in Greek culture. The Greek word for opportunity, *kairos*, occurs often in military narrative. There was also a term meaning 'to be on the look-out for an opportunity': *kairophylakein*. Helots employed such a mentality against the Spartans, as Aristotle shows. And the Spartans themselves were alert to it. In arranging with their enemy Argos (in 420) to settle a dispute by a battle at some future date, by appointment, Sparta agreed explicitly with Argos not to have that battle at a time when either side was distracted by war elsewhere, or by epidemic disease (Thuc. 5.41.2). Each thus predicted and guarded against the other's enduring sense of *kairos*. We shall see later ([Chapter 11](#)) that Sparta observed the need for strategic timing to a most remarkable extent. Over most of the fifth century she usually opened a war, or a campaign in a new area, against Athens when the Athenians were distracted by some special weakness. And, which is not the same thing, Sparta never began such a war or campaigned in a new area unless there was such a *kairos*. These correlations between Spartan initiatives and her opponent's times of weakness, are extensive and go far beyond coincidence. They emerge from Thucydides' narrative. But they do not emerge from any explicit generalization of his. Aristotle's generalization, about the helots' use of opportunity *against* Sparta, is a rarity. That Thucydides does not generalize here may be in part because his Spartan sources refused to talk in such general

terms. As well they might. For an awareness of how Sparta's actions were systematically governed by *kairos* would present enemies with opportunities of their own: opportunities to predict Spartan strategy, the timing and direction of campaigns, the periods and regions in which Sparta would *not* campaign. A strict policy of observing *kairos* logically imposed a desire to obscure the existence of that policy.

This enduring pattern of Spartan strategy suggests virtually a formula. And that the formula was employed for so long suggests a consistency of Spartan mentality over a long period. There was a lasting economy to Sparta's movement, a collective self-control which prevented Sparta's giving way to annoyance and to wishful thinking. There was, for example, no Spartan attack on Athens when Athens herself had cheated and defied Sparta by rebuilding her city wall in the 470s; that was not a time of *kairos*. Spartans knew how to wait. Sparta's consistent respect for opportunity is a case of her external acts, her foreign campaigns visible to Greeks generally, allowing us to reconstruct collective mentality within Sparta. Here was indeed a society of much (though far from total) similarity, over time as well as between individuals at each moment. Other cases of Sparta reacting somewhat formulaically will be seen elsewhere in this volume. The tendency already noticed, for Spartans to turn on their own kings, may be an example.

Another pattern observable in Sparta's behaviour away from home is the unwillingness to try to export the Spartan system. Athens, in contrast, in her empire vigorously exported copies of her own *dēmokratia*, with popular assemblies and democratically appointed officials encouraged to exist, or indeed imposed, in states under Athenian control. Sparta never acted correspondingly, but usually chose rather to impose oligarchies of traditional types, without promoting any general reform on 'Lykourgan' lines within subject states. Even when Sparta's hegemony was widest and most potent, in the years after the defeat of Athens in 404, there was no attempt to 'Lykourgize' Greece. Indeed, Sparta clearly had no settled policy in the matter of what regimes to impose – except in one respect: that other states were *not* to be reformed on Spartan lines. On defeated Athens, Sparta first imposed a government, 'The Thirty', which was inspired to a degree by Spartan models. But there is no evidence of Spartan pressure to reform Athens enduringly and structurally on 'Lykourgan' lines, and most significantly no trace of an attempt to introduce a rigorous Spartan style of education for the Athenian young. By 403 Sparta settled, remarkably, for an Athens ruled once again by insubordinate democrats, the very form of constitution which had generated so many decades of Athenian expansion, resistance and threat to Sparta. Clearly, almost any form of government at Athens was better, in Spartan eyes, than one which mimicked Sparta. This may well be another case of Spartan secrecy: Spartans, as Thucydides concluded, did not want others to *know* what the Spartan system amounted to. Other states, whose citizen

populations far outnumbered Sparta's, were not to be given what Sparta considered the formulae behind her own success.

We began by noting that there was something very modern about the Spartans: their manipulation of news, secrecy – in short state propaganda. The modernity may now be seen to go much wider. What Sparta achieved was to be a forerunner of modern industrial society, which since the eighteenth century has consciously and increasingly depended on *specialization*. Sparta's citizens were mostly forbidden to practise manual crafts – except that of the soldier. In soldierly qualities they were trained from childhood, and they had a lifelong training in loyal cohesion with their fellow citizens. This distinguished them, perhaps until the rise of Thebes in the fourth century, from every other Greek state which we know.³ It did not make them soldiers-and-nothing-else. Aristocratic fun and games lived on. Drunken dancing, as shown on the Laconian vases of the sixth century, was replaced by sober, sometimes warlike, dancing. Drunken *symposia* were replaced by sober *syssitia*. Erotic whipping turned into tests of manly endurance. But Sparta's overarching specialism consisted of systematically avoiding oppression by aristocrats, or conquest by helots and foreigners. The military aspect of Spartan life, necessary as *part* of that specialism, did not become obsessive militarism. But it gave Sparta enough of a military edge for almost two centuries to be *the* great land power of Greece.

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NOTES

- 1 Compare holiday trips to remote parts of the earth, involving days of confinement in austere if not fearful airports and planes. On a calculus of physical pleasure, such behaviour may not be easily explained. But as a search for high status, going to the Seychelles or the Bahamas is less problematic.
- 2 Nancy Boudighaghen (2017) argues convincingly that in the decades preceding Thermopylai there was no special disgrace for a Spartan force in retreating from a bad military situation.
- 3 Argos in 418, very likely in a half-hearted imitation of Sparta, had 1000 picked men who had been 'trained as soldiers over a long period at the state's expense': Thuc. 5.67.2.

CHAPTER 2

Sparta: An Exceptional Domination of State over Society?

Stephen Hodkinson

In their own way they were a great people; but their greatness sprang from qualities violently and astonishingly different from those that the world regards as typically Greek. ... The Spartan way of life, the discipline to which its adherents were subjected, was a strange one, unequalled in severity in any other time or place.

(Michell (1952) 1)

2.1 Changing and Contested Modern Views

The quotation above from the political economist Humfrey Michell expresses, in dramatic form, the usual view of Sparta in twentieth-century thought. Classical Sparta was typically depicted as an exceptional, even a unique, Greek *polis*: a city-state whose institutions and customs differed significantly from those elsewhere in the ancient Greek world – and from the norms of other civilized societies in human history. A key aspect of Sparta's exceptional character, according to this view, was the extraordinary domination which the Spartan state exercised over the everyday lives of Spartiate citizens: in Michell's words, the unparalleled discipline to which they were subjected as part of the Spartan way of life. This perspective remains common in the early twenty-first century.¹ Scholars who hold that Sparta was an exceptional *polis* continue to point to idiosyncratic aspects involving an unusually high level of state control: the testing of whether infants were physically fit to be reared, the publicly organized male upbringing, the compulsory common lifestyle of adult male citizens, the systematic organization of the army, the harnessing of women's roles in service of the *polis*, the imposition of set burial customs, and the strong degree of collective interference in the operation of the system of helotage.

Nevertheless, opinions regarding several of Sparta's supposedly exceptional features have altered significantly over the last half-century. Fifty years ago classical Sparta was normally portrayed as a conservative society which had shunned the socio-political changes experienced by other Greek city-states, retaining ancient institutions comparable to those of so-called 'primitive'

modern tribal societies such as the Zulu or the Masai.² Few scholars nowadays would subscribe to that interpretation. It has become evident that Sparta's classical institutions were as much the product of ongoing adaptation and change as those of other Greek *poleis* (Hodkinson (1997a) 88–92). In particular, the idea that Sparta underwent a 'sixth-century revolution',³ involving a radical transformation of earlier customs and practices, has become the new orthodoxy, especially in Anglophone scholarship.

Various alleged instances of exceptional state intervention have also come under challenge in recent years. Until the 1980s the standard view argued that Spartiate landownership was public in character: the *polis* controlled a pool of equal plots, which were allocated to Spartan citizens as a life tenancy and reverted to the *polis* on their death. Nowadays, in contrast, many scholars think that Sparta operated an essentially normal Greek system of private land tenure. Spartan citizens owned private estates of variable size, which they usually transmitted to their heirs through partible inheritance, but could also legally alienate to other citizens through lifetime gifts or testamentary bequests (Ducat (1983); Hodkinson (2000) 63–112).⁴

Similar challenges have also been posed to some of the supposedly idiosyncratic examples of state control listed in my opening paragraph. One recent study views helotage as a response to the same conditions that led to the growth of chattel slavery elsewhere in the Greek world (Scheidel (2008) 118); another maintains that Sparta's subjugation of the helots of Messenia was 'merely the most spectacular and best attested example of a form of imperialism characteristic of archaic Greece' (Van Wees (2003) 72). Several scholars have argued that, though subject as a community to various forms of public intervention, individual helots and their families were essentially the private property of particular Spartiate masters (Ducat (1990); Lewis (2018) ch. 6). Yet other studies have noted cross-cultural similarities between helotage and other systems of unfree agrarian servitude, such as slavery in medieval Korea and serfdom in modern Russia (Hodkinson (2003); Luraghi (2009)).

Likewise, it is now argued that the upbringing of Spartiate boys exhibited several features fundamentally similar to those of educational systems in other *poleis*, including an elementary education – in the 'three Rs', in oral expression, and in *mousikē* – of the usual Greek kind, privately funded by, and left to the initiative of, Spartiate families (Kennell (1995) 115–48; Ducat (2006) 119–78). This revisionist interpretation links with re-evaluations of the role of literacy in Spartiate life. Older accounts depicted the Spartan *polis* as antipathetic towards the written word: hence the education system gave Spartiate boys only a rudimentary training in reading and writing, leading to an unusually low level of literacy among adult citizens. The latest studies have concluded, on the contrary, that the written word was central to the conduct of *polis* affairs and that adult Spartiates, trained in reading and

writing at the private initiative and cost of their families, were far more literate than previously supposed.⁵ Recent reinterpretations of the Spartan upbringing have also questioned whether it was primarily geared towards systematic military training. This connects with other arguments that, despite her effectiveness in war, Sparta was far more than a military society: that martial organization and values did not dominate over other, more private, aspects of citizen life (Ducat (1999); Hodkinson (2006)).

These attempts to revise older understandings, however, have not gone unchallenged. A recent comparative study of Spartan and Greek religion, while acknowledging that occasional parallels can be found elsewhere for most of Sparta's unusual religious features, insists that Sparta was idiosyncratic in her systematic combination or aggregate of those features (Flower (2009)). In particular, Spartiate religious practice was exceptional in its 'key symbols', in its distinctive set of religious personnel, in the singular nature of its festivals, and in its worship of different gods and heroes from other Greeks. These singularities, it is argued, indicate more than merely the uniqueness of one facet of Spartan culture, since the significance of religion in Spartiate life made it in effect coterminous with the Spartan *polis*.

In sum, whether classical Sparta was an exceptional Greek *polis* is currently fiercely contested.⁶ As one commentator has observed, 'In recent years ... the traditional view of Sparta has come under increasingly intense scrutiny. ... In its place, intense debate has arisen over each and every facet of what we thought we knew about Sparta and the Spartans' (Kennell (2010) 2). The full range of disputed topics is too numerous for adequate coverage in a single chapter – many of them will be covered in subsequent specialist chapters in this volume. In this chapter, therefore, I will limit myself to two main issues. In [section 2.2](#), I will highlight the fundamental problems of evidence which bedevil debates over Sparta's alleged exceptionality. Then, in [sections 2.3–2.6](#), I will examine the central aspect of these debates already mentioned above: the question whether classical Sparta was marked by an exceptional domination of state over society.

My broad answer to this question will be that, although the state's direction of certain aspects of Spartiate life was unusual, overall its degree of control was not such as to constitute an exceptional domination of state over society. The qualified nature of this conclusion is important. The argument that classical Sparta did not embody an exceptional domination of state over society does not imply that there were no respects at all in which the role of the state was unusual. Moreover, this chapter purposely addresses just one issue, albeit one of the most central, in the wider debate over Sparta's exceptionality. My argument on this issue does not imply that in other spheres the Spartan *polis* did not display certain exceptional features – some of which will be noted in my discussion. Like most Greek *poleis* – and especially as one of the most successful and admired *poleis* in the Greek world – classical Sparta exhibited

a complex mixture of common features shared with other contemporary polities and distinctive features not precisely paralleled elsewhere. The challenge for modern students of Sparta is to identify both her elements of exceptionality and her elements of normality, without the one blinding us to the existence of the other.

2.2 Problems with the Ancient Sources

One important reason for the intensity of current controversies about the character of classical Spartan society, and about the relation of her institutions and practices to customs elsewhere in the Greek world, is a growing awareness of the difficulties posed by the surviving literary sources. Despite the existence of a gradually increasing body of archaeological data and inscriptions, the bulk of the surviving evidence for classical Sparta's political and socio-economic institutions comes from literary texts.

The primary difficulties can be stated simply. Almost all the contemporary literary accounts of classical Sparta emanate from outside Sparta itself; and the majority were authored by citizens from Sparta's political rival, democratic Athens. The images of Sparta presented by these authors are highly contingent upon the external – sometimes idealizing, but often hostile – perspectives from which their works were composed. Ever since the French classicist François Ollier's pioneering study, *Le mirage spartiate* (1933–43), scholars have been aware, in principle, of the challenges posed by the so-called 'Spartan mirage': that is, 'the ways in which ideal images of Sparta were propagated, sometimes by Spartans but more importantly by non-Spartans, to represent what they wanted Sparta to be' (Whitby (2002) 11). Only in recent years, however, has this fundamental insight been systematically applied in historical analyses of Spartan society.⁷ Current challenges to traditional views of Sparta stem to a large extent from recent efforts to re-evaluate the evidence of ancient literary texts influenced by the 'Spartan mirage'.

Classical writers in fact present quite divergent images of Spartan society; and they differ in particular over the extent to which Sparta was a typical or an exceptional *polis*. The poet Pindar, writing victory odes for the ruling and aristocratic lineages of early fifth-century Greece, depicts Sparta in similar terms to other well-ordered *poleis* whose citizens gave willing obedience to their lawful rulers.⁸ Later in the fifth century, the 'Old Oligarch', criticizing the licence accorded to slaves in Athens, asserts that 'it is no longer profitable for my slave to fear you; but in Lakedaimon my slave would fear you'.⁹ Writing for his oligarchic acquaintances outside Athens, the Athenian author takes it as read that his upper-class audience would identify with the Spartans' treatment of their servile population.

The *Histories* of Herodotus, written for a more diverse audience, present a more nuanced approach. The work includes an 'ethnographic' account of Sparta's dual kingship which differs markedly from his treatment of other *poleis* (6.51–9); though in several other respects Sparta is presented as little different from elsewhere. There are the usual inequalities of wealth and elite exchange of precious gifts (6.61–2; 7.134). Sparta's soldiers receive war booty alongside other Greek troops (9.81). Her citizens are accused, as typical Greeks, of cheating in the marketplace; and austere Spartan meals are treated as characteristic of general Greek poverty (1.153; 9.82). Overall, the Spartans are portrayed as oscillating between actions representative of the freedom of Hellas and 'behaviour antithetical to standard Greek *mores* and more akin to barbarian conduct' (Millender (2002a) 29).

Herodotus was influenced in this latter perspective by the aggressively polarizing ideology of Athenian democracy, which portrayed its enemy and imperial rival in consistently alien terms, including representing the Spartiates' ethos of obedience as being dependent on an external discipline imposed by a repressive oligarchy.¹⁰ Images of Spartan difference are highlighted even more directly by Thucydides, who asserts the existence of a specific Spartiate character type: fearful, over-cautious and vacillating, lacking confidence or initiative; in contrast to the self-confident, enterprising, fast-acting and straightforward Athenians.¹¹ A speech by King Archidamos ascribes these distinctive characteristics to the nature of the Spartiates' upbringing and way of life (1.83), whose peculiarity is also emphasized in speeches by Athenian protagonists. Perikles' Funeral Oration sharply contrasts the Spartiates' training and social *mores* with Athenian practices (2.37–8); and Athenian ambassadors to Sparta claim that their hosts' life at home is governed by customs incompatible with those of other *poleis* (1.77). A further alien character type in Thucydides' account, the duplicitous Spartan who says one thing while thinking another, appears in works by the contemporary Athenian playwrights Euripides and Aristophanes (Bradford (1994)). These authors also portray Sparta as a topsy-turvy world in which the women live free from normal constraints and dominate their husbands and fathers, thereby implicitly questioning the masculinity of Spartan men and bolstering Athens' ideological claims to imperial hegemony (Millender 1999; Poole 1994).

This tendency to view Sparta as an unusual society was given further life by two additional factors generated by Athenian democratic culture: the search for an alternative model of the *polis* by members of the Athenian upper classes alarmed by the alleged excesses of democracy and its erosion of their power and privilege; and the intensified enquiry into the theory of society which developed as part of the Sophistic movement patronized by disgruntled members of the elite.¹² These factors prompted a series of treatises on *polis* forms in which Sparta was placed centre stage as the most prominent counter-

model to Athens' democratic system.

Some of these treatises were specialized accounts of the Lakedaimonian *politeia*, such as those by Kritias (leader of the Spartan-backed Athenian junta in 404–403 BC, the 'Thirty Tyrants') and by the Athenian exile Xenophon. Their overt agenda was to demonstrate Sparta's superiority to other *poleis*. The full tenor of Kritias' account of Sparta is obscured by the survival of only fragments of his work; but two extant passages highlight the difference between Spartan drinking practices and those elsewhere.¹³ Xenophon's *Polity of the Lakedaimonians* explicitly sets out to argue that Sparta's lawgiver Lykourgos succeeded in making her the most powerful and celebrated *polis* in Greece, 'not by imitating the other *poleis*, but by adopting customs quite different from most' (1.2).

Another group of treatises comprised more wide-ranging analytical works, products of the philosophical schools in fourth-century Athens: works such as the *Republic* and *Laws* by the upper-class citizen Plato and the *Politics* of the resident alien (metic) Aristotle. In the *Republic* Sparta is linked with the so-called Cretan *politeia*, an invented constitution purportedly shared by the fifty or so separate *poleis* in that island (Perlman (2005)). Plato treats the Spartan and Cretan *politeia* as a distinct type of constitution, so different from the usual forms that it had no current name (544c–545b); hence Plato invents his own term: timarchy or timocracy (547c). Similarly, in the *Laws* – which takes the form of a conversation between three citizens, respectively, from Athens, Sparta and Crete – the Spartan and Cretan speakers remark that they are perplexed how to categorize their respective constitutions in terms of the recognized forms of tyranny, democracy, aristocracy and kingship (712d–713a). Their Athenian interlocutor agrees, asserting that Sparta and Crete alone possess real *politeiai*, since the recognized forms were merely partial constitutions named after the ruling element (Nippel (1980) 131; Hodkinson (2005) 229–31). Aristotle's *Politics* follows his teacher Plato in distinguishing Sparta as the prime example, followed by Crete and Carthage, of those *poleis* 'reputed to be well governed' (II, 1260b30–1; 1269a29–1271b19). Indeed, he goes even further by singling Sparta out as the exemplar of the newly emerging concept of the 'mixed constitution'.¹⁴

The opinions of major thinkers such as Plato and Aristotle regarding Sparta's exceptional character have exercised a significant influence on modern views. Yet their opinions were far from universally shared in fourth-century Athens. From the 350s onwards, pamphleteers and speakers in the Athenian assembly and law courts frequently assimilated aspects of Sparta's institutions and values to Athenian democratic institutions and practices. In his *Against Leptines* (355 BC) Demosthenes warns the judges against his opponents' intended use of Spartan precedent (20.105). In his *Against Timarchos* (346 BC) Aeschines does precisely that, invoking the example of a Spartan Elder, who had prevented the Lakedaimonians from voting on a proposal from a

shameful citizen, as a role model comparable to the Athenians' own ancestors (180–2).¹⁵ Sparta's Council of Elders (Gerousia) functions here as a parallel to the traditional Athenian council, the Areopagos, which is lauded earlier in Aeschines' speech (81–5; 92–3; cf. Fisher (1994) 373–4). In his *Panathenaikos* (339 BC) Isokrates develops this parallel, asserting that in founding Sparta's institutions her lawgiver Lykourgos had imitated Athens' ancestral government by establishing a democracy mixed with aristocracy, in which the Gerousia was given the same powers as the Areopagos (153–4). In his *Against Leokrates* (330 BC), the Athenian politician Lykourgos cites, alongside Athenian ancestral practice, a Spartan 'law' condemning those guilty of treason and cowardice to death, in support of his argument that the court should inflict on Leokrates a similar exemplary punishment for such crimes (128–30). Citing the exploits of the Athenians at Marathon and the Spartans at Thermopylai as parallel exemplars of bravery, he quotes inspiring martial verses by the Spartan poet Tyrtaios, invoking the invented tradition that the poet who 'had established their system of training for the young' was originally an Athenian by birth (105–9).

This 'Athenianizing' of Tyrtaios, apparently invented at the time of Athens' rapprochement with Sparta in the late 370s or early 360s, appears in several writers of the mid-late fourth century (Fisher (1994) 362–4). It symbolizes a renewed tendency to identify similarities between ancestral Athenian and Spartan customs, as Athens' imperial ambitions suffered increasing checks and her previously polarizing ideology gave way to a less self-confident democratic mindset, linked to a new backward-looking, conservative political programme which sought strength from parallels with other well-established political systems. The consequent change of perspective away from viewing Sparta as an abnormal *polis* is clearly reflected in the writings of Isokrates. His early works depict Sparta in alien terms. In the *Busiris* (c.390 BC), Sparta is portrayed as a regimented military society which had imitated certain Egyptian customs (17–18). In the *Nikokles* (c.368 BC) she is likened to non-Greek Carthage as an oligarchic constitution with a royal element. In the *Archidamos* (c.366 BC) Sparta's superiority to all the Hellenes is still attributed to her *politeia* being like a military camp (81); but the work also includes a veiled reference – the earliest surviving – to Athens' assistance to Sparta in sending the services of Tyrtaios (31). By the time of the *Areopagitikos* (c.354 BC) the Spartans are now said to be 'the best governed of peoples because they are the most democratic'. Sparta's particular form of democracy, involving equality in the selection of officials and a common citizen way of life, is assimilated to Athens' ancestral constitution, in support of the argument that Athenian officials should be chosen by election and the power of the Areopagos strengthened (61; Tigerstedt (1965–78) i.201). In the *Panathenaikos* (339 BC), as we have seen, Isokrates develops this assimilation to its furthest level in his claim that Sparta's institutions were actually imitations of Athens' ancestral government.

The contingent character of these contemporary accounts regarding whether she was typical or abnormal – which frequently depended on judgements about her similarity to or difference from Athens – means that the question whether Sparta really was an exceptional *polis* cannot be resolved through the opinions of classical writers, which tell us more about non-Spartan political and cultural ideology than about the historical Sparta. Whilst taking due account of these writers' perceptions, we need to move beyond their explicit opinions by viewing their comments in context and retrieving other, more implicit messages embedded in their texts. We should also seek to draw, where possible, upon a wider range of evidence – archaeological, epigraphic, geographical, statistical, as well as comparative evidence from other Greek *poleis* – to achieve a more detached and holistic interpretation.

2.3 An Exceptional Domination of State over Society?

As was noted in [section 2.1](#), one of the central aspects of current debates about whether classical Sparta was typical or unusual is the question whether the Spartan *polis* constituted an exceptional domination of state over society. This question involves fundamental issues regarding the nature of ancient Greek *poleis*.

Since the early nineteenth century, a common approach to understanding the nature of ancient Greek *poleis* has been to view them as political communities which shaped every aspect of human society and life; or (to phrase it another way) in which the 'State', in the sense of the 'rule-making authority', moulded all the private activities of its citizens.¹⁶ As John Stuart Mill expressed it over a hundred and fifty years ago, 'The ancient commonwealths thought themselves entitled to practise ... the regulation of every part of private conduct by public authority, on the ground that the State had a deep interest in the whole bodily and mental discipline of every one of its citizens' ((1859) 16). This view still exercises considerable influence. During the later twentieth century, however, several scholars – impressed by the interpenetration of public and private spheres within the *polis*, but dubious about the concept of the 'State' as an entity distinct from the community of citizens – developed a different approach which depicted Greek *poleis* in terms of an indistinguishable fusion of state and society. In the words of one of its earlier proponents, Ernest Barker ((1951) 5), the *polis* 'was State and Society in one, without distinction or differentiation; it was a single system of order, or fused "society-state ..."'.¹⁷

Both these interpretations were intended as depictions of ancient Greek *poleis* in general. In recent years they have been challenged by alternative

conceptions which emphasize Sparta's exceptional character compared with other *poleis*. One important challenge has come from the work of Mogens Hansen and the Copenhagen Polis Centre. In their view, the depictions above constitute only a partial picture of the generality of Greek *poleis*. They fit Sparta, where the state permeated society and exerted an overwhelming influence over its citizens' lives by means of 'public education, public regulation of marriage and family life, public restrictions on production and trade, and an enforced system of commensality on all male citizens'. However, they do not fit democratic Athens, which distinguished between the public and private spheres; and in which, provided he complied with the laws, a citizen could otherwise live as he pleased. The situation in other *poleis* (at least in democratically governed ones), Hansen argues, was closer to the Athenian separation of state and society than to their fusion in classical Sparta ((1998) 85, 98–106). A different challenge has come from historians who argue that Greek *poleis* were state-less political communities, which governed themselves with only a rudimentary official coercive apparatus and no organized militia or internal police force. Proponents of this interpretation also tend to view Sparta as an exception, characterizing it as a coercive community of professional warriors.¹⁸

Discussion of the theoretical issues of statehood underlying these divergent depictions lies beyond the scope of this chapter. A recent analysis has plausibly argued that Athens and many other *poleis*, including Sparta, did possess one of the essential conceptual requirements of statehood: a shared perception that members of the *polis* formed a corporate person, responsible for present and past business transacted in its name, but different from the aggregate of individual citizens living at any given time (Anderson (2009)). 'State' and 'society' hence formed analytically distinct but mutually constitutive entities. Hence Athenian or Spartan 'society' was partly the product of state intervention, partly of other influences. Conversely, the nature and extent of state interventions were influenced by the interests and agency of citizens acting in their personal capacities, individually or in groups.

From this perspective, the issue whether the Spartan *polis* was marked by an exceptional domination of state over society can be examined through two questions: first, whether the Spartan state determined the nature of Spartiate society and the lives of its citizens to an unusual degree compared with other *poleis*; second, whether Spartiate citizens had less scope than citizens elsewhere to exercise personal control over their private and household affairs. In [sections 2.4](#) and [2.5](#), I will examine each of these questions in turn. In [section 2.6](#), I will address a further issue raised by the foregoing discussion – to what extent Spartiate citizens were able to exercise private influence over affairs of state – as part of a broader analysis of the character of the Spartan *polis*.

2.4 Did the State Determine Spartiate Society and Citizen Life?

At first glance, the answer to this question may appear to be an unequivocal ‘yes’. According to a number of sources, especially Xenophon’s *Polity of the Lakedaimonians* (henceforth, *Polity*) and Plutarch’s *Life of Lykourgos* (henceforth, *Lykourgos*), the lives of adult male Spartiates were dominated by a series of public institutions in which every citizen was compelled to participate. This mandatory citizen life-course began with the only compulsory public system of male education attested in a classical Greek *polis*.¹⁹ From age seven to age twenty-nine every Spartiate boy, barring the two immediate heirs to the dual kingship, was reared within a public upbringing – often, but erroneously, called the *agōgē* by modern scholars²⁰ – comprising three fixed age grades: the *paides* (‘boys’, aged 7–c.14/15), the *paidiskoi* (‘youths’, aged c.14/15–19 years old) and the *hēbōntes* (‘young men’, aged 20–29).²¹ From age twenty, as a condition of his citizenship, each young Spartiate then joined a common mess, the *syssition*, where, according to Plutarch (*Lykourgos* 22.2–3), he had to dine with his messmates (barring occasional exceptions) every evening of his adult life. At age twenty he also became liable for military service for the following forty years until he reached age sixty.

The state’s control over this citizen life-course was reinforced by specific regulations governing the operation of these public institutions. The male upbringing was managed by a *polis* official, the *paidonomos*, who possessed full authority over the younger two age grades, including the power of physical discipline administered by a staff of *hēbōntes*. The boys in these two age grades were organized into horizontal sets each under the control of a twenty-year-old *eirēn* (Ducat (2006) 77–100). According to Xenophon (*Polity* 2.10–11), the underlying principle was that they should never be left alone without a ruler. The *paidiskoi*, in particular, were subjected to an intensive regime of exercises and testing, an officially prescribed pattern of modest behaviour and increased levels of surveillance. The penalty for serious or repeated lapses was exclusion from future adult citizenship (*Polity* 3.2–4).

The operation of the common messes, too, was governed by the official requirements that they mix citizens of different ages and that all messmates must contribute a fixed monthly quantity of a limited, austere range of foodstuffs, again on pain of exclusion from citizen rights.²² The messes themselves were physically located along the public space of the Hyakinthian Way. Finally, the army was organized according to a uniquely hierarchical command structure, attested in no other Greek hoplite force: the king at the top, with the *polemarchoi* under him, then the *lochagoi*, the *pentēkontēres* and, lastly, the *enōmotarchoi*, who led the smallest army units, the *enōmotiai*. In Thucydides’ words, ‘almost the entire army of the Lakedaimonians ...

consists of officers commanding subordinate officers' (5.66). In addition, rank-and-file Spartan soldiers were required to swear a special oath of obedience to their officers: 'I shall not desert my *taxiarchos* or my *enōmotarchēs* whether he is alive or dead, and I shall not leave unless the *hēgemones* lead us away.'²³

However, these elements of state control form only a partial picture of these institutions. To start with the education of Spartiate boys, their early, most formative years lay primarily in the hands of their families, since the public upbringing began only at age seven and the boys probably continued to sleep overnight at home until age twelve (Ducat (2006) 125). Moreover, to judge from contemporary ancient descriptions (especially Xenophon, *Polity* 2–4), the public upbringing focused only on the boys' physical development. It apparently did not cover their core elementary education (*paideia*), focused on 'the 3Rs' (*grammata*), oral expression and *mousikē*. By inference, these were taught by teachers privately paid by Spartiate families (Ducat (2006) 119–35; 333–4; Hansen and Hodkinson (2009) 485–8).

Even the public aspects of the boys' upbringing depended on significant inputs from the boys' families or from 'society' in general. When the *paidonomos* was absent, the control or disciplining of the boys fell to any citizen present; and any punishment thus administered was reinforced by the boy's own father (Xenophon, *Polity* 2.10; 6.2). When he left home fully at age twelve, each boy then came under the guidance of an older male lover (*erastēs*), typically one of the *hēbōntes* in his early twenties. Although a normative element in the boys' socialization, this pederastic relationship was a personal affair instigated or supported by family and friends.²⁴ During their subsequent period of testing, the teenage *paidiskoi* were closely monitored not only by the public officials, but also by their lovers and kin.²⁵ This personal support network continued to assist the twenty to twenty-nine-year-old *hēbōntes*, supplying their household necessities before they were allowed to enter the *agora* at age thirty (Plutarch, *Lykourgos* 25.1). Indeed, the entire public upbringing was viable only because of private economic support. Throughout his long years from age seven to age nineteen, the ability of each boy to participate in the upbringing rested on his family's capacity to provide the required food contributions to the children's *syssitia* (Kennell (1995) 133–4; Ducat (2006) 134–5). A significant number of boys from impoverished backgrounds, known as *mothakes*, were able to participate only as the 'foster-brothers' (*syntrophoi*) of boys from wealthier Spartiate families willing to provide private financial patronage.²⁶

Similar points can be made about the adults' common messes. Just as the public upbringing formed only part of the boys' overall education, so too the *syssitia* did not monopolize occasions of commensality. Plutarch's claim that attendance was a daily requirement for all Spartiates, including the kings, is qualified by classical evidence referring to the kings' eating at home or at

private dinners hosted by other citizens (Herodotus 6.57.3). The *syssitia* themselves were largely self-regulating entities whose detailed operation, although conforming to *polis* norms, lay outside the direct control of state officials. The selection of new members of each *syssition* lay in the hands of its existing messmates (Plutarch, *Lykourgos* 12.5). In practice, most young candidates put forward for selection were probably the beloved youths (*erōmenoi*) of existing members. Discussions and conversations within the messes were secret, immune from outside scrutiny: as members were reminded, ‘Through these [doors] not a word goes outside’ (ibid.). Although there was a standard set of rations for the main part of the meal, individual messmates were able to donate additional foodstuffs from their personal hunting activities or their private estates.²⁷ Finally, as in the upbringing, each messmate’s continuing participation rested on his economic capacity to provide the required food contributions from his household’s resources. During the classical period an increasing number of poor Spartiates dropped out of the *syssitia*, and hence lost their citizen rights, through their private incapacity to meet these compulsory dues.²⁸

The self-regulating nature of the messes also produced a degree of self-regulation in the organization of the army, since the messmates in each *syssition* also fought together in the smallest army unit, the *enōmotia*.²⁹ Consequently, the recruitment of young Spartan soldiers to particular *enōmotiai* was determined, not by the state or its generals, but by the rank-and-file members of each *enōmotia*, as the *hēbōntes* made their personal choices of twelve-year-old *erōmenoi* and, eight years later, their fellow messmates elected these *erōmenoi* as members of their *syssition*.³⁰ A similar dispersal of responsibility even extended to military decision-making. On campaign it was normal practice for the king to consult widely among both his senior and junior officers, right down to the *pentēkontēres*, three command levels below (Xenophon, *Polity* 13.4; *Hellenika* 3.5.22; 4.5.7). When one king, exceptionally, abandoned a campaign after minimal consultation, his decision – though reluctantly accepted in obedience to the law – aroused such bitter complaints that, on return to Sparta, he only narrowly escaped punishment and his authority was specially limited by the imposition of ten advisers without whose agreement he was unable to act (Thucydides 5.60, 63). In Thucydides’ view, the result of the army’s hierarchical command structure was that ‘the responsibility for what is to be done falls upon a great many people’ (5.66). On occasions this dispersed responsibility produced the remarkably disciplined behaviour for which Lakedaimonian troops were famous (e.g. Xenophon, *Hellenika* 5.2.6); orders made in consultation with junior officers had more traction among the ordinary soldiers under those officers’ command. But it also developed a culture in which initiatives from below often modified and even countermanded decisions by the king or other commanders. On several attested occasions lower-ranking officers purposely disobeyed orders or individual rank-and-file soldiers spontaneously shouted

out alternative tactics which their commanders immediately implemented.³¹ The Spartan army on campaign frequently operated more like a society of citizen soldiers than an institution under top-down control by the state.

In sum, we have seen that the state's influence over the overall Spartiate life-course was stronger than in other *poleis*. The reason, however, was not so much that Sparta's public institutions in the classical period involved radically different cultural practices from those elsewhere, but rather that they were transformed versions of practices common to most *poleis* – including early Sparta itself before the 'sixth-century revolution'. The *syssitia*, for example, represented a public transformation of Greek *symposia*, extended to embrace the entire citizen body and with a more formalized linkage to membership of the community (Hodkinson (1997) 90–1; Rabinowitz (2009) 161–7). The Lakedaimonian army was a more systematized version of normal Greek military forces (Herodotus 1.65). In classical Sparta these transformed institutions were combined under state direction into a coherent and compulsory overall life structure. As transformations of long-standing practices rather than new creations, however, the public institutions retained many aspects of former Spartan practice still present in other *poleis*. So, for example, Sparta's public upbringing continued to share several features – its commencement at age seven, its broad stages of development, and the liminal status of young men in their twenties – with the private upbringing of boys in other *poleis* (Kennell (1995), 115–48). One important feature retained from former practice was the considerable role which non-state elements continued to play within Sparta's public institutions: hence, as we have seen, the state's control over their operation was by no means all-encompassing.

Likewise, although it specified a mandatory overall life-course for all Spartiates, the state did not attempt to micro-manage the details of its citizens' daily lives. This is strikingly illustrated by comparison with Plato's directions in the *Laws* for the citizens of his imaginary, state-controlled *polis* of Magnesia. According to Plato's Athenian spokesman, 'a programme must be framed for all the free men, prescribing how they shall pass their time continuously from dawn to dawn and sunrise on each successive day' (807d–e). No contemporary classical source even so much as hints that Spartiate daily life was anything like this, not even Xenophon's *Polity of the Lakedaimonians*, which is at pains to highlight Sparta's distinctive aspects.³² The most that Xenophon says about the daily lives of adult Spartiates is that to enable them to remain fit for warfare, 'Lykourgos established the principle that ... hunting was the noblest occupation, except when some public duty (τι δημόσιον) prevented' (*Polity* 4.7). Later, when discussing the sharing of hunting dogs, he states that 'those who need them invite [the owner] to the hunt and, if he himself is engaged, he gladly sends them' (6.3) The implication is that, although a citizen's public duties took priority over private pursuits, only occasionally were they so time-consuming or ill-timed as to

interfere with a hunting expedition. Even a spontaneous invitation might find a wealthy owner of hunting dogs otherwise unoccupied and free to join the hunt.

This picture of a relatively unencumbered Spartiate daily life is confirmed by incidental details mentioned in Xenophon's narration of two specific episodes in Spartan history. In one episode – concerning the errant Spartiate commander Sphodrias – he depicts King Agesilaos II going down shortly after dawn to the River Eurotas (presumably to bathe) and engaging in personal conversation with other Spartiates, foreigners and servants, before returning to his home (*Hellenika* 5.4.28). In the other episode, he portrays the leader of a planned conspiracy, a certain Kinadon, taking a potential recruit on a tour of Sparta and its environs, to demonstrate how outnumbered the Spartiates were by other subordinate groups (3.3.5). In the *agora* they found the king, ephors and *gerontes* (members of the Gerousia) and about forty other citizens, along with over 4000 non-Spartiates. Walking around the streets, they came across Spartiates in ones and twos, among a number of non-citizens. Finally, on each of the Spartiates' country estates they observed a single master amidst a mass of other persons (presumably, helot labourers). Far from the uniform regime of state-prescribed collective daily activities in Plato's Magnesia, Xenophon depicts ordinary Spartan citizens independently going about their daily lives, following personal schedules focused on a range of private affairs – as in any other *polis*.³³

Of course, a Spartiate's daily life also included some supervised group activities undertaken separately from the non-citizen populations: elsewhere Xenophon mentions sessions in the *gymnasia* controlled by the most senior man present (*Polity* 5.8). However, there is no foundation for the common assumption that a Spartiate's daily life was dominated by military training. There is no evidence for dedicated weapons practice or mock combat, only for training in collective drill (*Polity* 11.5–10). For the most part, the Spartiates' preparations for war relied less on specialized military training, than on maintaining their physical fitness through the *gymnasion* and the hunt: in other words, through the standard pursuits of leisured elites throughout the Greek world (Hodkinson (2006) 133–8). Overall, therefore, an ordinary day in the life of an adult Spartiate was not excessively dominated by compulsory civic duties, at least until his expected attendance at his *syssition* in the evening – and it was permissible to miss even the *syssition* if delayed by sacrifice or the hunt (Xenophon, *Polity* 6.4; Plutarch, *Lykourgos* 12.3). Spartiate daily life was far from the state-controlled life of the citizens of Magnesia in Plato's *Laws*.

2.5 Spartiate Citizens and their Household Affairs

What about the converse issue, whether Spartiate citizens had significantly less scope than citizens elsewhere to exercise personal control over their household affairs? Is it true that – in contrast to Athens, which distinguished between the public and private spheres and in which a citizen could live as he pleased within the laws – a Spartiate’s private activities in areas such as marriage and family life, property ownership, production and trade were closely constrained by public regulation? The situation is complex; but, in my view, the answer is closer to ‘no’.

Contrary to common belief, Spartan ideology and practice accepted the legitimate existence of a private sphere outside state control. The clearest evidence is provided by Dionysios of Halikarnassos (20, excerpt 13.2). Contrasting Spartan practice with the intrusive scrutiny of private behaviour undertaken by the Roman censors, Dionysios argues that:

the Lakedaimonians [gained repute] because they permitted their oldest men to beat with their canes such of the citizens as were disorderly in any public place whatever; but for what took place inside their homes they neither worried about it nor kept watch over it, holding that each man's house door marked the boundary within which he was free to live as he pleased (τὴν αὐλειον θύραν ἐκάστου ὅρον εἶναι τῆς ἐλευθερίας τοῦ βίου νομίζοντες).

Dionysios is a relative late source, from the first century BC; but the existence of a domestic domain exempt from official control is already mentioned by contemporary fourth-century writers. The citizens in Plato’s timocratic *polis*, modelled on Sparta, ‘entrench themselves within the walls of their homes’, where ‘they can spend lavishly on their wives and anything else they choose’ (*Republic* 8.548a). Aristotle’s explanation (*Politics* II, 1271b11–15) for the emptiness of the Spartan public treasury – ‘as most of the land is the property of the Spartiates themselves, they do not enquire too closely into one another’s war taxes (*eisphorai*)’ – indicates a general consensus that personal tax affairs should be beyond external scrutiny.³⁴ This is not to say that Spartiate domestic or financial space was always absolutely inviolable. Xenophon (*Polity* 7.6) claims that in the early fourth century citizen homes could be searched for illegal gold and silver. This, however, was merely a short-lived measure covering an exceptional period when private possession of precious metal currency was briefly prohibited (Hodkinson (2000) 166; Lipka (2002) 168).³⁵ The accounts of Plato, Aristotle and Dionysios indicate the more usual state of affairs. They suggest that, as in Athens, the Spartiates normally distinguished between the public and private spheres and were even open to the principle of a citizen living as he pleased – though, in contrast to Athens, the operation of this principle was restricted to the household domain.

In keeping with the principle of non-interference in the household, Spartiate families had considerable leeway to devise their own marriage and inheritance

arrangements: more leeway, in fact, than their counterparts at Athens or Gortyn on Crete (the only other *poleis* for which we possess detailed evidence).³⁶ In the late archaic and early classical periods many Greek *poleis* were faced with the challenge of unfettered competitive generosity between citizen families in giving their daughters increasingly large marriage dowries, a practice which threatened to erode male property-holding and the inheritances of male heirs (Van Wees (2005) 5–9). *Poleis* had two options for restricting this practice: to limit female property ownership or to downgrade women's property rights. Athens intervened strongly on both counts, entirely excluding women from direct inheritance and giving their husbands control of the dowry. In contrast, Sparta and Gortyn merely capped female property ownership by incorporating the dowry as the daughter's *pre-mortem* share of the inheritance and limiting it to half a son's share.³⁷ In consequence, wealthy Spartiate families retained their capacity to give large dowries and male property-holding dropped as low as 60 per cent of the land (Aristotle, *Politics* II, 1270a23–5).

Spartiate families also had the greatest latitude as regards the marriage of heiresses (Patterson (1998) 93–103). Under both Athenian and Gortynian law, when a man died without sons, his male next-of-kin had the right to marry any surviving daughter, regardless of any arrangements her father had made for her, unless she was married and already had a son (in Athens) or child of either sex (in Gortyn).³⁸ In Sparta a father's marriage arrangements had greater force. An heiress who was already married (whether or not she had children) or even merely betrothed by her father (either during his lifetime or even in his will) retained her existing or intended spouse (Herodotus 6.57.4; Aristotle, *Politics* II, 1270a26–9). Only in the case of an unmarried and unbetrothed heiress did the father's next-of-kin acquire the right to marry her.³⁹ Spartiate families were also less constrained by the rules stipulating whom such heiresses should marry. In both Gortyn and Athens there was a fixed order of precedence within the kin (*Gortyn Code* cols. VII–VIII; Harrison (1968–71) i.11–12). In Gortyn the pool of legally eligible males was especially restricted: relatives outside the patriline were excluded; and, if there was no eligible kinsman, the husband had to come from the same civic subdivision as the heiress's father. In Sparta there were no such restrictions: if the next-of-kin did not wish to marry the heiress himself, he could marry her to any citizen he chose. Unlike in Athens and Gortyn, therefore, there were no official measures to compel families to keep the marriage of the heiress and the devolution of her father's property within the kin group, or to ensure the survival of the *oikos* as an independent unit. These matters were left entirely up to Spartiate families themselves.

This greater than normal latitude in marriage arrangements is also shown by the diversity of marriage practices – besides the standard monogamous marriage – available to Spartiate families, including several unusual practices

unattested in (most) other *poleis*. One was the practice of polyandry, whereby several brothers shared the same wife (Polybius 12.6b.8). Another was the practice of wife-sharing, in which a man could request another citizen's wife to sire children of his own (Xenophon, *Polity* 1.8–9). This practice was connected to a third unusual practice: marriage between uterine half-siblings (children of the same mother but different fathers), which enabled the woman's sons and daughters by her different partners to intermarry.⁴⁰

Together these practices gave Spartiate families an unrivalled capacity to concentrate their property and to limit the number of children. They thereby made a significant economic and demographic contribution to the problem of *oliganthrōpia* (lack of citizen manpower) which Aristotle viewed as the key internal cause behind Sparta's loss of external power in the mid-fourth century: a cause rooted in severe inequalities of wealth among her citizen body and the impoverishment of increasing numbers of Spartiates (*Politics* II, 1270a15–b6). On this issue too Spartan policies eschewed any significant degree of state intervention. There was no attempt to raise citizen numbers by naturalizing Inferiors or *perioikoi*, no attempt to sever the link between *syssitia* membership and citizen rights, no public subsidies towards the mess dues of poor Spartiates, no redistribution of land to restore their fortunes. Instead, the state resorted to largely cosmetic measures aimed at increasing the birth rate through modifying individual behaviour. Penalties were imposed on men who failed to marry; and exemptions from military service and from taxation were offered, respectively, to fathers of three and four children.⁴¹ Otherwise, wealthy Spartiate families were left largely unchecked to pursue their marriage and inheritance strategies aimed at maximizing their private wealth, to the detriment of their poorer fellow citizens. At Gortyn, in contrast, surviving legal texts attest multiple official interventions aimed at sustaining the maximum number of citizen households above the level of economic viability (Davies (2005) 168–9). The difference from Sparta's laissez-faire approach could hardly be greater.

The 'hands-off' approach of the Spartan state to marriage and inheritance is readily intelligible, since property-holding in classical Sparta was fundamentally private in character (Hodkinson (2000) 65–186). Both men and women owned personal landholdings, which they had nearly full rights to dispose of as they pleased. Spartiate landowners could transmit their estates to their children on their death by means of partible inheritance – though daughters, as we have seen, often received their share on marriage. If he lacked a male child, a man could adopt a son from another household to become his heir. Landowners could also disinherit their natural heirs, wholly or partially, by passing on their landed property to a third party through lifetime gifts or testamentary bequests. The only restriction on their rights of alienation was that sale of one's land was dishonourable, though not strictly illegal. In Aristotle's judgement, the restriction on sale, but not on gift and

bequest, was woefully inadequate, since ‘this inevitably leads to the same result’ (*Politics* II, 1270a19–22). The high degree of personal control available to Spartiate landowners is again highlighted by comparison with Athenian and Gortynian law, which both imposed much tighter restrictions on testamentary bequests. At Athens they were available only to men without legitimate sons; at Gortyn the only permissible way of changing the succession to one’s property was through adoption, which – unlike in Sparta – was closely controlled by detailed legal specifications (Schaps (1979) 21; Davies (2005) 168–9).

Besides their landed estates, Spartiates also privately owned a range of items of movable wealth: livestock, various kinds of valuables and precious metals, and even (apart from the brief period already mentioned) foreign coinage. The private character of property ownership was moderated by certain communal rights of use – under certain conditions a Spartiate could make use of another citizen’s helots, hunting dogs or horses (Xenophon, *Polity* 6.3–4; cf. Aristotle, *Politics* II, 1263a30–9) – and by the compulsory levies of produce for the common mess dues; but none of these had a significant redistributive effect (Hodkinson (2000) 187–208). Instead, the state tried to reduce the impact of economic inequalities by limiting the ways in which Spartiates could use and display their wealth. Sometimes this was implemented through measures singular to Sparta, such as a unique marriage ritual, in which the bride was placed alone in an unlit room, where she was secretly visited by the bridegroom in the short interval between dining in his mess and returning to sleep in his barracks (Plutarch, *Lykourgos* 15.3–4); this clandestine sexual intercourse, performed with minimal interruption to each partner’s daily routine, was maintained throughout their early marriage. The whole procedure contrasted sharply with the lavish preparations, expenditures and public display involved in marriage rituals in contemporary Athens and elsewhere (Hodkinson (2000) 230). More often, the state limited its citizens’ expenditures through measures similar to, if occasionally more extreme than, sumptuary legislation attested elsewhere: for example, limitations on feasting in the common messes, uniformity of dress, and restrictions on burial goods and funerary display (ibid. 216–26; 24–56).

Despite these restrictions, however, there remained important spheres of private activity in which citizens could legitimately employ their surplus wealth, especially religious dedications, the deployment of personal patronage, and horse-breeding for chariot racing followed by the monumental commemoration of equestrian victories (ibid. 271–368). In this last sphere, in particular, wealthy Spartiates spent enormous sums comparable to, or even exceeding, private expenditures in other *poleis*.

What about the remaining area of close public regulation, production and trade? It seems that in the classical period Spartiate citizens were prohibited from engaging personally in non-agricultural money-making activities

(Hodkinson (2000) 177–9). However, these prohibitions did not prevent them, like leisured elites in other *poleis*, from profiting from the surplus produce of their landed estates or engaging in productive and commercial activities through the agency of third parties. Sparta's officially sanctioned iron currency, with its bulky size in relation to its artificially assigned low value, formed a practical barrier between the stored treasure held by elite households and the sphere of market transactions (Figueira (2002)). However, the very need for this *practical* barrier was that there was no *legal* separation of civic from market activity: no equivalent of Thessaly's 'free *agora*', from which market activity was excluded (Aristotle, *Politics* VII, 1331a30–b4). Xenophon's account of the conspirators' tour mentioned earlier depicts the Spartan *agora* as a bustling market, so commercially active that stalls selling different kinds of products were grouped into separate zones: a place where state officials conducted civic business cheek-by-jowl with other Spartiates and non-Spartiates engaged in market transactions (*Polity* 3.3.5–7). The right to buy and sell and to enter the *agora* for market exchange was a central privilege of Spartiate citizenship (Thucydides 5.34; Plutarch, *Lykourgos* 25.1). Once again, Spartiates were able to exercise personal control over their household economies, entering the market to sell surplus produce, to acquire household needs, or to remedy shortfalls in the foodstuffs required for their mess contributions.

2.6 Totalitarian State, Multiplicity of *Koinōniai*, Plutocratic Society?

It is clear from the variety of evidence discussed in the previous two sections that the Spartan state exercised a more limited degree of direct control over Spartan society and the daily lives of Spartiate citizens than is usually thought; and, conversely, that Spartiate families had considerable scope, often more than citizens in other *poleis*, to exercise private control over their household affairs. Why then has the notion that Sparta embodied an exceptionally close domination of state over society exercised such an influence over modern academic thinking? One powerful reason is Sparta's association in recent western thought with two major twentieth-century totalitarian regimes, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. The Nazi association has had an especially significant impact because National Socialist politicians and theorists, along with many German classical scholars, themselves identified Sparta as an important model for the Third Reich (Losemann (2007, 2012); Roche (2012, 2013)). This identification was readily taken up by academics opposed to Nazism (Hodkinson (2010)). Already in 1934, in the early years of Nazi rule, the eminent ancient historian Victor Ehrenberg, Professor of Ancient History at the German University in Prague,

titled a talk about Sparta on Czechoslovak radio ‘Ein totalitärer Staat’ (‘A totalitarian state’). The talk concluded with a prescient warning linking Sparta to the rising Nazi threat: ‘Sparta set up, not an example to be imitated, but a danger-signal to be avoided.’ Its subsequent publication in English, following Ehrenberg’s enforced emigration to Britain as a Jewish refugee scholar, gave his interpretation particular prominence. The notion of Sparta’s totalitarian character has remained strong ever since, embedded in scholarly assumptions linking her to the Nazi or Soviet systems.⁴²

In reality, however, Sparta was nothing like a modern totalitarian regime. Sparta exhibited practically none of the features which characterize totalitarian systems: a totalist ideology; a single mass party; the concentration of power in an unaccountable individual or small group irremovable by peaceful institutionalized means; a fully-developed secret police; and a monopolistic control over operational weapons, mass communications and economic institutions with the capacity to create a centrally planned economy (Friedrich (1969) 126; Linz (2000) 67). As we have seen, Spartiate ideology was far from totalist, acknowledging that state intervention should not extend within the household space.⁴³ There were no mass party or enduring formal political organizations: Spartiate politics was characterized by a diversity of individuals and shifting groups engaged in fierce competition. Power was not concentrated or unaccountable, but dispersed among a range of offices, such as the dual kingship, the ephorate and the Gerousia, whose holders could legally be put on trial or removed from office (Xenophon, *Polity* 8.3–4). There were peaceful institutionalized mechanisms for the selection or rotation of office holders. There was no secret police exercising surveillance over Spartiate citizens.⁴⁴ Finally, the Spartan state did not exercise a monopolistic control over weapons, communications or economic institutions. Spartiate citizens possessed their own arms. The ephors might make public pronouncements representing official views, but there were no all-pervasive state media to dominate citizen opinion. Spartiate society contained multiple, and often competing, channels of communication through different office holders and institutional groups. Many gatherings of citizens, especially the daily *syssitia*, took place with no high state officials present.⁴⁵ Above all, as we have seen, the Spartan state conspicuously refrained from intervening in the economy. There was no equivalent of Nazi Germany’s *Reichserbhofgesetz* (*State Law of Hereditary Entailment*) or of the Soviet Union’s collectivization of agriculture and Five Year Plans.

Instead of domination by a totalitarian state, the key feature of the Spartan *polis* was, rather, the active participation of the whole citizen body in community affairs. The upbringing of Spartiate boys, for example, was achieved not just by the *paidonomos* with his staff of *hēbōntes* and *eirēnes*, but by the material support provided by their families or patrons, the admonitions of their mothers, the mentoring from their *erastai*, the right of

any citizen to discipline any boy, the informal scrutiny by the elderly men (Plutarch, *Lykourgos* 16.5, 17.1, 25.2), and the judgements chanted by the girls in their choral songs (Plutarch, *Lykourgos* 14.3). It was this widespread community involvement that gave Sparta the all-encompassing atmosphere often misinterpreted by modern commentators as totalitarian control. The *homonoia* ('unanimity') for which the Spartiates were famed was not an oppressive mass conformity imposed by the state, but the communal and participative (though also competitive) sociability recognized by Pindar when he listed 'dances and the Muse and joyousness' among the key features of Spartiate life.⁴⁶

Some of this communal participation and sociability took place in occasional mass gatherings, such as the adult male decision-making assembly (the *ekklesiā*) or religious festivals attended by the entire Spartiate population; but most daily citizen activities took place within a multiplicity of much smaller groups. When Xenophon describes the everyday occasions from which a coward would be excluded, he highlights a range of activities conducted in modest-sized groups: the *syssitia* – comprising fifteen or so men (Plutarch, *Lykourgos* 12.2) – exercise in the gymnasium, team ballgames, and the chorus (*Polity* 9.4–5). To these we should add other everyday small-group activities, such as the regular hunting parties or modest-scale religious activities such as guild, clan and hero cults.⁴⁷ On campaign too, much of a Spartiate's time was spent with the thirty-odd comrades in his *enōmotia*. We should also remember small-scale private groupings of citizens, such as the intimate comrades (*hetairoi*) and friends (*philoī*) who play a key role in Xenophon's account of the episode of Sphodrias: standing by the accused commander, engaging in dialogue with his enemies, watching for visitors to his son, and giving the son news of his father's imminent acquittal (Xenophon, *Hellenika* 5.4.25–33). Nor should we forget a citizen's one-to-one, extra-familial relationships: the pederastic relationship that every citizen had with his *erastēs* and subsequently with his *erōmenos*, and the individual relationships that some citizens had with their patrons or their foreign guest-friends (*xenoi*).⁴⁸

These one-to-one, small or medium-sized groupings are examples (by no means exhaustive) of what Aristotle termed *koinōniai*: associations or partnerships of varying types and duration, both long- and short-term. For Aristotle, one way of viewing the *polis* was as an overarching *koinōnia* comprising the diverse multiplicity of smaller *koinōniai* in which its inhabitants participated (*Politics* I, 1252b28–32; *Nikomachean Ethics* VIII, 1160a8–29; *Eudemian Ethics* VII, 1241b25–7). Recent research has suggested that this perspective provides a particularly fruitful way of analysing ancient Greek communities (Vlassopoulos (2007), 68–99, 143–55). One advantage is that, in place of the top-down, state-centred perspective whose limitations have been analysed above, it enables us to view Spartiate life from the bottom up, from the standpoint of the citizens themselves. It presents a Spartiate

citizen's life as a more variegated affair than we might otherwise imagine, as he participated in a range of different *koinōniai*, involving a changing group of persons, during the course of his private and public activities. Furthermore, it reinforces our appreciation of the agency that citizens retained to shape, not only their family affairs, but also the character of the various public institutions in which they participated, as the operation of those institutions through small-group *koinōniai* created greater scope for individual and collective choices and decisions.

This perspective also helps us to address the final issue posed at the end of [section 2.3](#): to what extent Spartiate citizens were able to exercise private influence over affairs of state. We have already seen how the private decisions of Spartiate families, especially those from wealthy lineages, about their property, marriage and inheritance arrangements made a significant contribution to the decline of Sparta's citizen numbers and the consequent erosion of her external power. This private influence of wealthy Spartiates on the public realm, however, was more than simply a by-product of their family concerns; it was fundamental to the functioning of the Spartan *polis*. Throughout Sparta's history her citizen body had always been marked by inequalities of wealth. Seventh-century Sparta had the reputation as a *polis* in which only the wealthy counted and in which the acquisitive behaviour of the rich and the impoverishment of poor citizens provoked a civil war focused on demands for a redistribution of land.⁴⁹ The remodelling of Spartan society and creation of the common citizen way of life in the 'sixth-century revolution' probably provided poorer Spartiates with sufficient land and helot workforce to free them temporarily from agricultural labour and enable them to meet their *syssitia* dues; but there was no fundamental redistribution of land or alteration to the system of private property ownership. The uneven distribution of property remained and became increasingly severe from the fifth century onwards. By the later fourth century the private riches of wealthy Spartiates had become notorious ([Plato], *Alkibiades I*, 122d).

The influence of this private wealth penetrated into many of Sparta's central public institutions and activities. As has already been noted, personal wealth played a key role in funding the private elements of the upbringing and the education of *mothakes*. Richer members of the *syssitia* gave their messmates special donations of wheaten bread and meat dishes from their private estates (Xenophon, *Polity* 5.3; Hodkinson (2000) 356–8). Poorer Spartiates were reliant on dogs borrowed from their wealthier fellow-citizens for a proper hunting party. Even the horses in Sparta's early-fourth-century cavalry were supplied by the 'very rich' (Xenophon, *Hellenika* 6.4.10–11). These deployments of private wealth necessarily affected citizen relationships. Many former *mothakes* surely lived their adult lives with a lasting obligation to their patron foster-brothers; poorer members of the *syssitia* and hunting parties surely felt indebted to their wealthier messmates or hunting companions.

Many of the small-group public *koinōniai* of Spartiate life will hence have embodied unequal social relationships.

Similar inequalities also operated within more private friendship groupings. The *hetairoi* of Sphodrias mentioned by Xenophon appear to be men of comparable standing to the commander: as members of the court about to try him, they were presumably ephors or *gerontes*. However, these men were also the *philoι* of King Kleombrotos, who had appointed Sphodrias to his command, and the implication of Xenophon's account is that their intention to vote for his acquittal was influenced by the king's wishes. This implication is even clearer regarding the *philoι* of the other king, Agesilaos: once Agesilaos gives his opinion that Sphodrias should not be punished, his acquittal by the king's *philoι* is taken for granted (*Hellenika* 5.4.25, 32–3). In his encomium in honour of Agesilaos, Xenophon gives a fuller account of the range of the king's clients and the social and economic favours through which he put them in his debt (*Agesilaos* 4.5, 8.1, 9.1–2, 11.8).

In the episode of Sphodrias, Sparta's kings, Agesilaos and Kleombrotos, cooperated in mobilizing their *philoι* to secure the acquittal of a guilty client of Kleombrotos. According to Xenophon, the trigger for Agesilaos' willingness to cooperate was a personal request from his son, who was the lover of Sphodrias' son, Kleonymos. The contrast with Athenian courts, governed by rigorous procedures for the selection of jurors designed to ensure the exclusion of private influence, could hardly be greater. The episode provides the clearest example of the exercise of private influence over the affairs of state, but it is by no means alone.⁵⁰

Indeed, the ability of leading Spartiates to influence state affairs was powerfully enhanced through another type of *koinōnia* mentioned above: their ties of guest-friendship (*xeniai*, sing. *xenia*) with their foreign guest-friends (*xenoi*, sing. *xenos*). Such *xeniai* were possible only for wealthy citizens, since their maintenance required substantial amounts of wealth. Their importance in Sparta is illustrated by the fact that almost a quarter of known *xeniai* in the archaic and classical Greek world involved a Spartiate *xenos*, more than for any other *polis*.⁵¹ The relationship entailed an obligation to assist one's foreign *xenos* in several ways, including politically. The Spartan *polis* made particular use of *xeniai* contracted by Spartiates with oligarchic friends in allied *poleis* within the Peloponnesian league: these foreign *xenoi* were expected to influence their *poleis* to support Sparta's control over league affairs. In return, if one of these foreign *xenoi* appealed to Sparta for help, that invoked an obligation on the Spartan *polis* which his Spartiate guest-friend could turn to his own advantage. The appearance in Sparta of a suppliant *xenos* – doubtless often pre-planned with his Spartiate guest-friend – gave the Spartiate partner a legitimate reason, indeed an obligation, to intervene to try to influence Spartan policy on his behalf: an obligation which would be acknowledged, and even applauded, by other citizens. Unsurprisingly, King

Agessilaos, the past-master of manipulating Spartan policy in favour of his private interests, maintained a wide range of personal *xeniai* with foreign *xenoi*, whose collaboration helped him to dominate foreign policy-making for over a generation (Cartledge (1987) 242–73; Hodkinson (2000) 348–52).

To summarize the preceding paragraphs: far from the Spartan state exercising a totalitarian control over the citizen body, Spartiate citizen life operated through a multiplicity of smaller public and private *koinōniai* which, practising varying degrees of self-regulation, provided particular scope for wealthier citizens to deploy their private influence throughout the public domain, right up to the level of state policy.

The results of this private influence can be detected through prosopographical analysis of named office holders and other prominent Spartiates from the sixth to the fourth centuries BC. Despite major gaps in the evidence, there are sufficient indications that a restricted group of wealthy lineages successfully perpetuated their wealth and elite status over several generations (Hodkinson (2000) 409–16). Likewise, a snapshot of the best-documented period of Spartan history, the Peloponnesian War and early-fourth-century Spartan empire, reveals both a considerable number of Spartiate military commanders who hailed from elite social backgrounds and several cases in which both father and son(s) gained major political, diplomatic or military posts (Hodkinson (1983) 261–3; (1993) 157–9). The grip of elite families over high offices of state is also attested for the ultimate honour of all, membership of the Gerousia, limited to a select group of men over age sixty. According to Aristotle (*Politics* V, 1306a18–19), the choice of members was *dynasteutikē*, ‘dynastic’, limited to a narrow range of families.

The stranglehold over leadership positions exercised by the wealthy few is perfectly explicable in terms of the non-totalitarian perspectives advocated above. An all-controlling state would have tended to appoint Sparta’s leaders from a wide cross-section of the citizen body, irrespective of wealth or birth, in order to ensure the priority of state interests. Instead, leaders emerged through a combination of competitive processes and private influence. As Thomas Figueira puts it, the outcomes of personal competition in the public upbringing ‘imposed themselves on the governmental area’, as ‘adolescent competition conditioned the choice of the Hippeis, which conditioned the selection of the Agathoergoi, Hippagretai, and other military offices, which conditioned the choice of the magistrates’ ((2007) 302).

In principle, such personal competition could have produced a spread of leaders from a wide range of families. Perhaps some Spartiate boys from humble backgrounds did achieve leadership positions on their personal merits. However, they have left no trace in the historical record. In the few attested cases in which boys rose to high office from a disadvantaged start in life, close inspection reveals that high birth or personal connections were probably at work. Three of Sparta’s prominent commanders in the Peloponnesian war –

Kallikratidas, Gylippos and Lysander – are said to have begun life as *mothakes* (Aelian, *Varia Historia* 12.43). Kallikratidas' personal circumstances are unknown, but Gylippos was the son of an exile condemned to death for treason (Plutarch, *Perikles* 22.2; cf. Thucydides 6.104) and Lysander was brought up in poverty (Plutarch, *Lysander* 2.1). None of them could have passed through the boys' upbringing without private sponsorship from a wealthy Spartiate family; and both Gylippos and Lysander were further supported in their rise to prominence by inherited and personal advantages. Gylippos' father Kleandridas had been adviser to the Agiad king Pleistoanax: the two men had been condemned and fled into exile together; but Pleistoanax had been restored to the throne in 426, twelve years before Gylippos' appointment to his command in Sicily in 414. Lysander was from a family of noble lineage which possessed a relationship of *xenia* with a Libyan king; furthermore, while a *hēbōn*, Lysander himself had acquired a personal connection with Sparta's Eurypontid royal house, as *erastēs* of the future King Agesilaos (Plutarch, *Lysander* 2.1; 22.3; *Agesilaos* 2.1; Diodorus 14.13.5–6).

Indeed, participation in the upbringing was far from equal. As in the cases just considered, disadvantaged boys could participate only as sponsored foster-brothers of richer boys; and all boys were mentored throughout by their families, their families' *philoi* and their *erastai*. As in modern educational systems, wealthier boys with well-connected mentors doubtless had far better chances of success. Moreover, 'success' and progressive promotion through the select positions listed by Figueira were not determined by objective performance. There was no equivalent of the US Olympic track-and-field trials, in which (with minor exceptions) the top three competitors on the day automatically qualify for the Olympic team regardless of past history. Instead, apart from the Agathoergoi, promotion to the positions listed above was decided by selection processes conducted by individuals or small groups already in positions of leadership.⁵² In these circumstances it is hardly surprising if each generation of leaders tended to replicate itself when choosing Sparta's future leaders. Moreover, once the sons of wealthier families were embedded in such leadership positions, they also inevitably monopolized access to positions chosen by more popular methods. The 'dynastic' selection of members of the Gerousia was conducted in a publicly competitive process decided by popular acclamation in the citizen assembly (Plutarch, *Lykourgos* 26.1–3); but the only elders with realistic chances of success were surely those who had already gained prominence through holding previous leadership positions decided by top-down selection.

In consequence, throughout the classical period Sparta operated effectively as a plutocracy in which Spartiate state and society were dominated by the private interests of the wealthiest families. For much of the time the impact of this plutocracy was masked by the superficially levelling effect of the common citizen way of life and the restrictions imposed on certain means of

everyday expenditures. As Thucydides (1.6) commented, ‘in general those who had great possessions adopted a lifestyle that was as much as possible like that of the many’. Increasingly, however, rich Spartiates found ways of using their wealth to distinguish themselves from their fellow citizens, even in opposition to state policies.

The most notable example is the dominating string of victories in the Olympic four-horse chariot race achieved by wealthy Spartiates from the 440s to the 380s: a phenomenon made possible by the increasing size of their landed estates and involving massive expenditures on horse breeding and on commissioning victory monuments (Hodkinson (2000) 307–33). The kudos of Olympic success gave chariot owners international prestige and advanced some of them into prominent political and military positions. It posed such a threat that King Agesilaos II attempted to discredit the sport as a womanly activity by persuading his sister Kyniska to enter her own chariot team. But to no avail: Kyniska’s double Olympic victories in the 390s simply prompted other wealthy women to enter the sport. Sparta’s wealthy families were still expending their private resources on ‘feeding teams of ravenous horses’ as late as the 360s, when the *polis* itself was starved of public resources (Isokrates, *Archidamos* 6.55).

Around the same time, rich Spartiates also demonstrated their ability to resist attempted restrictions on their use of precious metal currency. Although Sparta itself minted only an iron currency, Spartiate citizens had long been able to possess precious metal currency minted elsewhere or circulating as bullion. In 404, however, the *polis* suddenly prohibited private possession, owing to the influx of unprecedented amounts of foreign currency from Athens’ defeated empire. Despite official efforts to ensure compliance, the prohibition was soon flouted, with some Spartiates even boasting of their possession of gold. By the late 360s the ban had totally lapsed: wealthy Spartiates had successfully re-asserted their long-standing rights.⁵³ As we saw earlier, they were equally successful in resisting state attempts at taxation. In 432 King Archidamos II reportedly told the Spartan assembly: ‘we neither have public funds nor do we readily contribute from our private resources’ (Thucydides 1.80). A century later Aristotle confirmed the Spartiates’ systematic under-payment of their *eisphorai* and the consequent emptiness of the public treasury (*Politics* II, 1271b11–15).

The determination of wealthy Spartiates to resist state impositions on their property was matched by their relentless acquisition of additional landholdings from their poorer fellow citizens. Aristotle cited ‘Sparta, where properties keep coming into the hands of a few’ as his prime example of an aristocratic constitution with oligarchic tendencies in which the notables were particularly grasping (*Politics* VI, 1307a34–6). The impoverishment of poorer citizens that led to the decline in Spartiate numbers and undermined the foundations of Sparta’s early-fourth-century empire was a direct result of this

private property accumulation. The external power of the Spartan *polis* and, indeed, the future course of Spartan history were fundamentally determined by private influences.

It is no surprise, therefore, that the changed political and social environment of late-fourth- and early-third-century Sparta witnessed erosions of the public domain and its control over the private activities of leading citizens. One indication is the number of prominent Spartiates who absented themselves from Sparta for long periods on private ventures as mercenary commanders (Hodkinson (2000) 434). Another is the transformation of the *syssitia* from compulsory, frugal daily gatherings to voluntary *symposia* marked by luxurious dining and exotic foods and wines (Phylarchos, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker* 81 F144, ap. Athenaios, *Deipnosophistai* 141f–142b). The public upbringing appears to have continued, but was in serious need of restoration (Ducat (2006) x). By the middle of the third century Sparta had become a sharply stratified *polis* dominated by a mere one hundred wealthy Spartiates, whilst the remainder were without resources or civic rights (Plutarch, *Agis* 5.4: ἄπορος καὶ ἀτιμος ἐν τῇ πόλει).

2.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have set out to examine one of the central aspects of the debate about whether Sparta was an exceptional *polis*: namely, whether the Spartan *polis* constituted an exceptional domination of state over society. I posed three key questions: first, whether the state determined the nature of Spartan society and the lives of its citizens to an unusual degree compared with other *poleis*; second, whether Spartiate citizens had significantly less scope than citizens elsewhere to exercise personal agency in their household affairs; and, finally, to what extent Spartiate citizens were able to exercise private influence over affairs of state.

On the first question, we have seen some respects in which Sparta was unusual, especially the state's imposition of a common citizen life-course, including institutions such as the boys' public upbringing and the daily evening *syssitia*. However, the degree of direct control exercised by the state over these institutions and, in general, over the daily lives of Spartiate citizens was more limited than usually portrayed in modern scholarship. On the second question, we have seen that Spartiate families had considerable scope, often more than citizens in other *poleis*, to exercise private control over their household affairs. On the final question, we have seen that Sparta was not a totalitarian state. On the contrary, the private influence of wealthy citizens conditioned all levels of public activity, from the operation of the small-group *koinōniai* in which Spartiates led their everyday lives through to the highest levels of official policy-making. By the fourth and early third centuries the

private activities of wealthy Spartiates had become so free from state restraints that they undermined the very economic basis of the common citizen way of life and, with it, the foundations of Spartan power.

Was the classical Spartan *polis*, then, marked by an exceptionally close *fusion* of state and society, as some scholars have claimed? In the usual meaning of that phrase, the permeation of society by the state, the answer must be ‘no’. One might argue, indeed, that over the course of the classical period Sparta came increasingly close to exemplifying the phrase in the opposite sense, the permeation of the state by society. On a long-term perspective, Sparta in the fourth and early third centuries had become a type of *polis* similar in key respects to archaic Sparta of the seventh century: a plutocratic society marked by severe inequalities of wealth and dominated by private interests and acquisitive behaviour of the rich. In between, for a couple of centuries or so following the sixth-century revolution, a partially effective compromise was reached, in which the lifestyles and interests of rich and poor were brought together to some degree through Sparta’s distinctive state institutions and citizen way of life. Over time, however, both public institutions and affairs of state became thoroughly penetrated by societal influences stemming from the private resources and activities of wealthy Spartiates.

The stage was thus set for a further swing of the pendulum in the later third century and early second centuries, when a series of kings and personal rulers attempted to rein in those private resources and activities, under the claim of reimposing Sparta’s traditional ‘Lykourgan’ public institutions (Cartledge and Spawforth (1989) 38–79). In contrast to the sixth-century compromises, however, the outcome was internecine internal conflict which, in combination with outside interventions by major foreign powers, culminated in the removal of the last vestiges of the classical Spartan state.

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NOTES

- 1 For example, Thomas R. Martin’s well-regarded *Ancient Greece: From Prehistoric to Hellenistic Times* (Yale, 2000) records no fewer than six examples of Spartan exceptional practice within five pages of discussion (pp. 66–70).
- 2 Jones (1967) 34; Forrest (1968) 53–4; Jeffery (1976) 111, 114.
- 3 The phrase was originated by Moses Finley (1968) 144–6 = (1975) 162–4 = (1981) 25–7.
- 4 For a different account, closer to older views, see Thomas Figueira’s [Chapter 22](#) in this volume.
- 5 Cartledge (1978); Boring (1979); Millender (2001); Ducat (2006) 119–21.

- 6 See the recent debate between Mogens Herman Hansen and myself: Hansen (2009); Hodkinson (2009); Hansen and Hodkinson (2009).
- 7 E.g. Ducat (1990); (2006); Hodkinson (2000); (2006).
- 8 *Pythian I*, ll. 61–70; fr. 199 Maehler, ap. Plutarch, *Lykourgos* 21.4; cf. Will (1956) 59; Finley (1968) 156 = (1975) 173–4 = (1981) 36–7.
- 9 Pseudo-Xenophon, *Constitution of the Athenians* 1.11. On the interpretation of this passage and its application to the Spartan helots, Ducat (1990) 27–8.
- 10 Millender (1999); (2001); (2002a); (2002b).
- 11 Thucydides 1.68–71; 2.93–4; 5.13; 8.96; Westlake (1968); Hodkinson (1983) 263–4; Bradford (1994) 66–78.
- 12 Ollier (1933–43) i.164–8, 206–14; Tigerstedt (1965–78) i.153–6, 233–41.
- 13 Frs. B 6 & 33 Diels-Kranz, ap. Athenaios, *Deipnosophistai* X, 432d; XI, 463e.
- 14 *Politics* II, 1265b33–6a1; IV, 1294b13–34; cf. II, 1270b7–26; IV, 1293b14–18; Hodkinson (2005) 227–37.
- 15 According to Aeschines, the Athenians’ ancestors would, like the Spartan Elder, have excluded his disgraceful opponents, Timarchos and Demosthenes, from public affairs.
- 16 I borrow the phrase ‘rule-making authority’ from Anderson (2009), esp. 2 n. 2.
- 17 For brief outlines of various versions of this view, Hansen (1998), 84–5; Anderson (2009) 5–6. On the broader historiographical developments underpinning the emergence and establishment of these views, Vlassopoulos (2007) 28–63, esp. 36–8, 45–7, 52–63.
- 18 E.g. Berent (2000) 260, 264, 266, 273, and esp. 261 n. 33, 269; (2004) 367, 371, 382 n. 6. Cf. Cartledge (1996) 182 n. 12 = (2001) 203 n. 11.
- 19 I purposely omit consideration of the physical training of Spartiate girls, the paucity of evidence for which makes it uncertain whether it was state organized: Ducat (2006) 243.
- 20 On the erroneous use of the term *agōgē*, Kennell (1995) 115–16; Ducat (2006) xi–xiv, 69–71.
- 21 On the age grades and the years each covered, see briefly Hodkinson (2007) 55; and in detail, Ducat (2006) 81–112.

- 22 Xenophon, *Polity* 7.3; Aristotle, *Politics* II, 1271a26–37; Dikaiarchos, *Tripolitikos*, ap. Athenaios, *Deipnosophistai* 141c; Plutarch, *Lykourgos* 12.2; discussion in Hodkinson (2000) 190–9.
- 23 Van Wees (2004) 98, 243–4. Strictly speaking, this oath – deduced from a mid-fourth-century inscription (Rhodes and Osborne (2003) no. 88, lines 25–8) – relates only to the battle of Plataia in 479 BC, but it was almost certainly long-standing Spartan practice.
- 24 Ducat (2006) 164–8; Link (2009) 96–101. Note Xenophon’s account (*Hellenika* 5.4.20–34) of the relationship between Archidamos and Kleonymos, with its depiction of emotional personal engagement and initiative, family manipulation and the supportive roles of friends (Hodkinson (2007)). I purposely avoid the intractable problem of whether pederasty was institutionalized or legally imposed: as Fisher (1989) 46 n. 37 notes, ‘this is not necessary for it to be the norm’. In this publication aimed at a general readership, like Cartledge (1981), I use the general Greek terms for lover and beloved, *erastēs* and *erōmenos*, rather than the local terms *eispnēlas* and *aītas*.
- 25 This is the obvious implication of τοὺς κηδομένους ἐκάστων: ‘those who look after each of them’ (Xenophon, *Polity* 3.3).
- 26 Phylarchos, *FGrH* 81 F43, ap. Athenaios, *Deipnosophistai* 271e–f; Aelian, *Varia Historia* 12.43; Hodkinson (1997b) 55–62; Ducat (2006) 151–5.
- 27 On the workings of the *syssitia*, Hodkinson (1983) 251–4; Fisher (1989); Hodkinson (2000) 190–9, 216–18, 356–8.
- 28 Aristotle, *Politics* II, 1270a15–b6; 1271a26–37; 1272a12–16.
- 29 An *enōmotia* typically contained upwards of thirty men. The number of *syssitia* to an *enōmotia* is uncertain and disputed: see the discussions cited in Hodkinson (2006) 153 n. 110.
- 30 Some *erōmenoi* were doubtless judged unsuitable and ‘blackballed’ in the election process: we know nothing of the fate of such young men.
- 31 Disobedience: Herodotus 9.53–7; Thucydides 5.71–2; spontaneous rank-and-file tactics: Thucydides 5.65; Xenophon, *Hellenika* 4.2.22; cf. 7.4.24–5.
- 32 Plutarch does claim that Spartiates ‘always had a prescribed regimen and employment in public service’ (*Lykourgos* 24.1; 25.3); but he was writing 500 years or so later, reflecting the full development of the Spartan mirage.
- 33 Whether Xenophon’s scenes of daily life in these episodes are strictly historical or largely imaginary, based on his close knowledge of Spartiate

life, is irrelevant for our purposes.

- 34 We should not be misled by Plato's and Aristotle's negative depictions of these Spartiate behaviours, with their associated implications of illegality, which is explicable by the focus of their work on the best arrangements for the *polis* as a community.
- 35 At *Polity* 14.3 Xenophon himself reveals that the prohibition was overtly flouted.
- 36 For a more detailed version of the following account, Hodkinson (2009) 438–42.
- 37 Patterson (1998) 73–83, esp. 82; Hodkinson (2000) 98–103; (2004) 104–6; Link (2005) 13.
- 38 Harrison (1968–71) i.11–12 and Appendix I; Schaps (1979) 28; *Gortyn Code* 8.20 ff. At Gortyn a childless heiress could avoid the obligation only by ceding half her inheritance to the next-of-kin (7.52 ff.).
- 39 A similar process of adjudication between rival claimants to this position applied in both Sparta and Athens. In Athens such cases fell under the *dikastērion* of the eponymous *archōn* (Harrison (1968–71) i.10–11); in Sparta under the jurisdiction of the kings (Herodotus 6.57.4). There is no evidence for the commonly held view that Spartan kings would allocate heiresses to landless citizens: Hodkinson (2000) 95.
- 40 Philo, *On Special Laws* 3.4.22, who also states that marriage between non-uterine half-siblings was possible in Athens.
- 41 Xenophon, *Polity* 9.5; Plutarch, *Lykourgos* 15.1–2; Aristotle, *Politics* II, 1270a39–b6.
- 42 Ehrenberg (1946), quotation from p. 104; Finley (1962); Lazenby (1985) vii; Connor (1984) 3; Kagan (1995) 25, with 76 n. 10, 444–5; Hansen (2009) 398; cf. Cartledge (2001) 84–5; Hodkinson (2012).
- 43 It is important to distinguish here between state measures which limited a Spartiate's time within the household or intervened in domestic relationships (the public upbringing, daily attendance at the *syssitia*, restrictions on contacts between newly-weds) and the acknowledgement that behaviour within the physical space of the household was exempt from public interference.
- 44 The infamous *krypteia* – in which selected young men lived a temporary period of privation hiding in the remote countryside, among other things targeting helots for murder – was not aimed at supervising other Spartiates and did not provide systematic surveillance even of the helots: Ducat

- 45 Xenophon, *Polity* 15.4; Plutarch, *Kleomenes* 8.1, 9.4; Aelian, *NA* 11.19. The kings and the ephors dined separately from ordinary Spartiates: the ephors in their own mess; the kings in a joint royal mess together with certain of their entourage.
- 46 Fr. 199 Maehler, ap. Plutarch, *Lykourgos* 21.4; Hodkinson (2005) 258–63.
- 47 For these cults, see the references listed in Hodkinson (2000) 232 n. 13.
- 48 Cartledge (1981); (1987) 139–59; Hodkinson (2000) 335–68.
- 49 Alkaios fr. 360, Campbell, ap. Schol. Pindar, *Isthmian* 2.17; Tyrtaios fr. 1 (West), ap. Aristotle, *Politics* VI, 1306b36–1307a2; cf. van Wees (1999) 3–4; Hodkinson (2000) 2, 76.
- 50 Cf. Xenophon, *Hellenika* 5.3.24, where Agesilaos, away on campaign, gets his friends back in Sparta to arrange things on his behalf.
- 51 Hodkinson (2000) 337–8, drawing on the data in Herman (1987) 166–75, 180–4.
- 52 Selection processes for the *hippagretai* and *hippeis*: Xenophon, *Polity* 4.3; *agathoergoi*: Herodotus 1.67; overseas military offices: Hodkinson (1993) 159–61. We have no specific information about how the regular army officers were selected.
- 53 Hodkinson (2000) 170–6; Plutarch, *Lysander* 17.1–6; Xenophon, *Polity* 7.5–6; 14.3.

PART II

Origins: From Pre-Classical to Classical Culture

CHAPTER 3

An Archaeology of Ancient Sparta with Reference to Laconia and Messenia

William Cavanagh

There are many possible approaches to the archaeology of Sparta. Here there will be an emphasis on urban and rural settlement, sanctuary sites, burials, communications and fortifications; accounts of glyptic and vase painting and Laconian art more generally can be found in [Chapters 5](#) and [6](#).¹

3.1 Dark Age Laconia and Messenia c.1200–700 BC

A critical period for the formation of the Spartan state, the so-called Dark Age, is shrouded in obscurity. If we depended on archaeology alone we would certainly not know that by the end of this era Sparta was well on the way to establishing its power over most of the southern half of the Peloponnese. The evidence of myth and later tradition provides a shaky foundation for the period's history, but simple extrapolation backwards from our more secure knowledge of the archaic period confirms the fact. Archaeology can, at least, provide the setting for this process.

Mycenaean power in Laconia and Messenia was brought low at the end of Late Helladic IIIB, roughly 1200 BC. The clearest excavated evidence comes from the palace at Pylos (in Western Messenia) and the great mansion at the Menelaion, but we can be confident that other centres in Laconia, such as that at Pellana, were also devastated; the palace at Ayios Vasilios, Laconia, was destroyed a century earlier (Vasilogamvrou 2014). In this they were part of a much larger catastrophe which engulfed the rest of Greece and the Near East; but the effects seem to have been even more severe in our regions than, for example, in the Argolid or Attike (Eder 1998; Deger-Jalkotzy 2008).

The consequence was a reordering of the region's political geography. To judge from what we know of Pylos, Knossos and Thebes, the Mycenaean palaces controlled kingdoms covering hundreds of square kilometres, much larger than the territories of most of the city-states which eventually succeeded them (though not Sparta's); the Mycenaean kings administered their realms through a network of second- and third-order towns. The fall of the palaces, the decline of the towns and the great drop in population left not only a power vacuum, but also areas where much of the land was unoccupied.

After a twilight period in the twelfth century, a new order slowly emerged in the eleventh to tenth centuries BC. Conventionally the arrival of the West Greek, proto-Geometric pottery style has been seen as a sign of the invasion of Laconia by Dorian tribes (Cartledge (2002) 65–87; Eder 1998; for more sceptical views Nafissi (2009) 118–19; Luraghi (2008) 46–67). Archaeology, with its own limitations, suggests rather a period of anarchy and disruption, by the end of which (say 800 BC) a network of more settled communities was established in Laconia, Messenia, Elis, Achaia, Acarnania and the Ionian islands (Coulson 1985; 1986). These used similar types of vase decorated in similar ways. The vases are found at sacred sites for serving food and drink, in settlement sites and accompanying burials where they evidently symbolized the feasting and celebrations the deceased enjoyed in life. The cultural community here is one of shared festivities, religious celebrations, perhaps weddings, funerals and other rites of passage.

Our clearest picture of village life comes from the excavations at Nichoria in Messenia, an open village of simple houses: rough stone foundations, clay walls, and posts supporting a thatched roof (McDonald et al. 1983, 9–60). Similar houses are found over much of mainland Greece, though in Sparta we can point only to a couple of postholes (Steinhauer (1972) 242–3). The largest at Nichoria (122 m²) was probably the home of the village leader (Figure 3.1). Once established, this community was settled and lasted some 300 years into the eighth century BC.

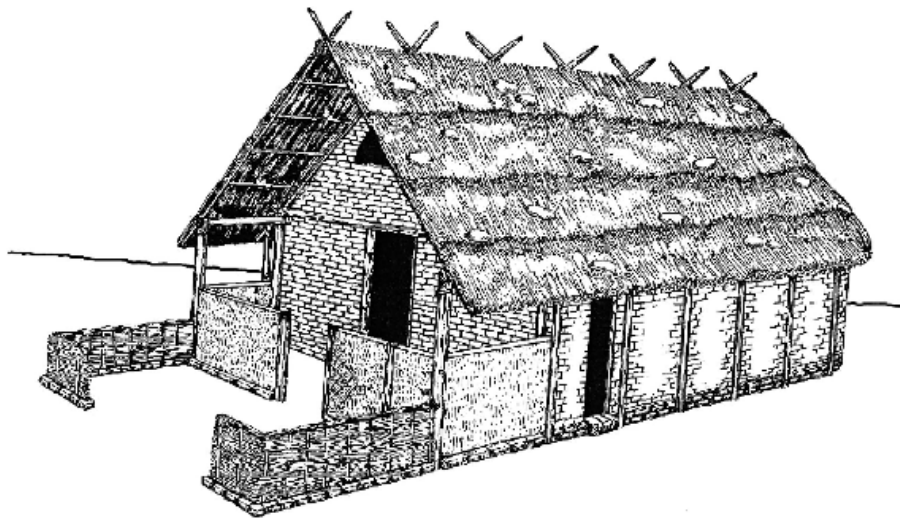


Figure 3.1 Reconstruction of unit TV-1 at Nichoria.

(From McDonald et al. 1983, 37 fig. 2–3). *Source:* Author.

In Laconia by the tenth century BC the seeds of what was to come were already sown; not only were Sparta and Amyklai settled, but also centres which were to become important perioikic cities (Geronthrai, Pellana,

Kardamyle, Kyparissia (Boza) and possibly Gytheion) as well as rural sites such as Anthochori, Apidea, Asteri-Karaousi, Daimonia, Peristeria and Pavlopetri. Some (though not, for example, Geronthrai) had been Mycenaean towns, but others have a gap in the pottery sequence taken to mean the sites had been deserted for a century or two. Recent excavations, however, have begun to turn up the critical 'missing link', sub-Mycenaean pottery, as at Sparta (*Archaiologikon Deltion* 52 (1997) 1679), Epidauros Limera, Pellana, perhaps Amyklai and Peristeria (Themom (2007) 460–1; Demakopoulou 2009). Moreover, earlier traditions continued (Mycenaean Poseidon continued to be worshipped and a memory of the office of 'wanax', the Mycenaean king, persisted). More contentiously, the vocabulary which was core to the archaic Spartan constitution developed from a terminology which is found in Linear B (basileus, damos and gerousia, [king, people and council of elders]). Symbolic of such distorted memories is the cult at Amyklai: the sanctity of the site was remembered, but the deity changed sex from a Bronze Age Potnia to Apollo/Hyakinthos (Eder (1998) 98).

Sparta in the tenth to ninth centuries BC may have looked something like Nichoria, but note first the wide distribution of the finds and second the indications that cult was already carried out at major sanctuaries, marking Sparta's proto-urban status. The distribution is recognized either through clusters of single graves, in pits or cists, possibly each serving a kin group, or deposits of pottery, indicating settlement. They are known from all over Sparta itself (Zavvou and Themom (2009) 112 fig. 11.10) and from Amyklai (Zavvou 1996). Offerings are not very common, but some of the graves include drinking vessels (skyphoi, oinochoai), gold beads and pins with bronze globes. Burials are also reported from Laconia more widely: a warrior grave, with an iron weapon, found near Gytheion (Hope Simpson and Waterhouse (1961) 115–17), the whole vases from Kardamyle (probably from a grave), and a pithos (storage jar) burial from Pellana (Spyropoulos 2002.) The single graves mark a new beginning, as up to the very end of the Mycenaean Age collective tombs were the norm. Similar graves with similar finds are known from the NE Peloponnese, particularly from the Argolid. Interestingly, in Messenia various forms of collective tomb prevailed, in this respect at least, serving to distinguish the customs in the two regions, though they both shared a tradition of pithos burial, perhaps also to be linked with the Argolid.

Vases dating from c.950 BC onwards have been found at sanctuaries: of Apollo and Hyakinthos at Amyklai, at Artemis Orthia and the 'Heroön', some 500m to the north, both by the Eurotas at Sparta and at Athena Chalkioikos on its acropolis (Coulson 1985). Whilst we must beware of extrapolating back to early times the conditions of a later age, the roots of that cycle of festivals, which were fundamental to the Spartan way of life, evidently were built on these foundations. In the NE Peloponnese, an early phase of rural sanctuaries

serving independent villages is seen to have been transformed only in the eighth century when they were taken over by the emergent powers of Argos or Corinth. Sparta was different, with a link between sanctuary and village encompassed by a broader territory already united, if we can trust tradition, under the dual kingship.

Similar early pottery has been found at the cult site at Sela ('the Saddle'; Pikoulas (1986) 444) high on Taÿgetos and at Volimnos, the sanctuary of Artemis Limnatis on the border between Laconia and Messenia. These cult sites confirm the early Spartan interest over the mountain to the west, also borne out by the close ceramic links between Sparta and Nichoria.

As we move towards the end of the eighth century BC there is that trend of increasing lavishness in cult offerings that has been registered in contemporary sanctuaries elsewhere in Greece. Bronze figurines, dress pins, fibulae (brooches) and jewellery are among those that survive intact – larger, more prestigious offerings included a variety of bronze vessels, notably monumental tripod cauldrons. Large pottery kraters and outsize jugs were specially made (Coldstream (2008) 216) to serve the feasts, perhaps they accompanied gifts of wine contributed by the richer aristocrats of the time. Sanctuary sites are founded or revived, notably a number in the countryside: Helen and Menelaos at the Menelaion, Zeus at Tzakona, Apollo at Phoiniki, shrines at Pellana and Kokkinia. It is quite probable that the sacred cult images such as the massive statue of Apollo at Amyklai (roughly 15m high), sheathed in metal in the geometric *sphryrelaton* (hammered) technique, or the mythical wooden image of Orthia, held by her priestess at the trial by whipping, were made at this time. Fragments of slightly later beaten bronze statues from Olympia have been ascribed to a Laconian workshop (Kyrieleis 2008). Early temples at Artemis Orthia and Pellana (Spyropoulos (2002) 24–5) are also part of this same fashion for investment in the sacred; if anything Sparta may have been rather late in building temples to house its cult images. On the other hand, Spartan participation in the early Olympic games is borne out by material offerings, figurines and bronzes, as well as by the early victor lists (Hodkinson 1999; Christesen, this volume, [Chapter 21](#)).

The Spartan impact on Messenia is recognizable through the style of pottery, through metal finds, notably a series of bronze horse figurines, and a number of well-appointed pithos burials including some warriors (at Sparta three: Raftopoulou 1995; Steinhauer (1972) 244–5 and fig. 1; at Nichoria, and Pera Kalamitsi in eastern Messenia, Pyla and Viglitsa in the west: Coldstream (2003) 162). The pottery, the pithos burials, the warrior graves and some of the grave offerings find contemporary parallels at, and might reflect influence from, Argos (Coldstream (2003) 145–9; such burials are also widespread in Achaia, *ibid.* 377), but more importantly the finds suggest a common culture shared by the people of Laconia and Messenia.

Given the ancient tradition that the first Messenian war happened before 700

BC, it has been suggested by modern scholars that the abandonment of sites such as Nichoria in the middle of the eighth century was the result of aggression (Morgan (1990) 100). As in much of western Greece (Achaia, Elis, Triphyllia), and in contrast to much of the rest, no single city-state emerged to dominate any extensive part of Messenia and this may have helped Sparta to subjugate the region – unless the as yet only sketchily known Geometric site at Mavromati below Mt Ithome was such an embryonic city, known to Tyrtaios (and Homer) as Messene and crushed untimely by the Spartans (Luraghi (2008) 70–5, 112–13). Though there are sceptics, archaeology gives some support to the tradition of eighth century BC refugees from Asine in the Argolid invited by the Spartans to found the town in Messenia, to which they gave the same name. The earliest Spartan vases from Taras in S. Italy and nearby help confirm the Spartan role in founding that city, further witness to the early state's expansionism.

Thanks to a growth of population and increasing prosperity (and Laconia seems to have enjoyed both), eighth-century Greece had become a land of nucleated villages and small towns. Neither archaeological survey nor excavation has produced evidence for a densely occupied landscape. The technique of intensive archaeological survey, where a region is systematically scoured for surface remains, has inspired four main projects in Laconia and Messenia: the Laconia Survey plus Laconia Rural Sites Project (Cavanagh et al. 1996, 2002, 2005), the Pylos Regional Archaeological Project (Alcock et al. 2005 with further references; <http://classics.uc.edu/prap/>), the Kythera Island Project (<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/kip/>) and the Antikythera Survey Project (<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/asp/en/intro.shtml>). They aim to document all remains of human activity in a surveyed area (mainly scatters of pottery and tile for the Greek and Roman periods) and thereby provide a reliable index of historical change. They complement more extensive explorations (note recent work by Pikoulas, Themis and Zavvou) in particular by locating the whole range of settlements from small farmsteads up to towns. Interpretation of their results needs care, and the method has its limitations, notably because of problems of 'visibility', but they throw light where written sources are lacking or unreliable.

In the Laconia Survey area (70 km² to the east of Sparta) cult was revived at the Menelaion, but no small farms or hamlets, or indeed settlements of any kind, were discovered. Preliminary reports suggest that the same was true of Kythera and Antikythera. It was not a simple shortage of land which lay behind the Spartan occupation of Messenia or indeed its colonization of Taras. Rather, any land hunger might have been a result of the engrossment by aristocratic families of large estates, which were not intensively farmed, but equally were not made available for free subsistence farmers (a process for which there is clearer evidence from Attike – Coldstream described 'the rise of landed aristocrats' in rural Attike, 2003, 135). Political divisions and

rivalries will also have given impetus to movements of population (Malkin 1994, 2009). Whatever the causes of what we observe in the Spartan countryside, the pattern of nucleated settlement with no evidence for small farmsteads continued through the seventh century BC.

3.2 The Archaic Period c.700–500 BC

3.2.1 *Cult and sanctuaries*

Our archaeological picture of Sparta at this time is dominated by the sanctuaries. Different types of simple votive offering witness an increasing elaboration in popular cult. Already in the Geometric period (~900–700 BC) miniature vases were dedicated as votives (Coldstream (2008) 215; Lane (1933–34) 154–6). These carefully thrown and painted offerings slowly gave way to much cruder handmade, slipped pots which imitated the standard types of the archaic potter's repertory – skyphoi, kantharoi, mugs, bowls, aryballoi, pedestalled amphoriskoi. These simple votives started in the seventh century BC and continued into at least the third century BC – though precise dating is almost impossible. They are found in their hundreds at most Spartan shrines; were everyday offerings, and it is not impossible that some were made by the votaries themselves (R. Catling (1996) 84–5).

Miniature vases not unlike these were dedicated at sanctuaries in other parts of Greece. A more distinctive type of offering are the small lead figures (illustrated in this volume at [Chapter 6, Figure 6.5](#)), which may have started, like the vases, as tokens of more valuable offerings made of bronze or precious metals and textiles, but which evolved into many different types: the most common varieties are warriors and females, standing for those who offered them, but also represented are a winged goddess Orthia/Artemis, in time joined by the main Olympian gods, plus animals both mythical and real, musicians playing pipes or lyres, komast figures and, what were to become the most common type of all, wreaths. In other words they reflect most aspects of the cult: worshippers, offerings, celebrants, deities and the creatures sacred to them, and the crowns worn by those who attended. Their production starts earlier in the seventh century, initially at the shrine of Artemis Orthia, and they continue in production probably no later than the fifth century BC.

Although they crop up in small numbers at most Laconian shrines (and a few outside Laconia) they are found in thousands only at Artemis Orthia and the Menelaion, and so have a special association with worship there (Boss 2000).

Also characteristic of Spartan worship are crudely modelled clay figures – the most common type is ithyphallic in a crouched pose, though less common

types include a figure posed over a low table, female figures shown pregnant, or with their genitalia displayed. The male figures, in particular, may have had a special connection with the cult at the sanctuary of Zeus Messapeus at Tsakona, where the figurines were found in their thousands (Catling 2002). On the other hand, the more standard, mould-made, daedalic figurines, of a type found throughout Greece, occur at most sanctuaries. Bells were dedicated at the sanctuary of Athena Chalkioikos and cymbals to Artemis Limnatis, clay plaques to Alexandra/Cassandra and Agamemnon/Zeus. Not high art, these offerings underline the unique character of Spartan popular cult. Each type is found in large numbers only at specific shrines with a few strays elsewhere, indicating that their dedication was normally tied in with the rituals reserved for particular festivals at specific sanctuaries.

The more expensive dedications, stone sculpture, bronzes, ivories, which are described in [Chapter 6](#), were dedicated widely, not only in Sparta, but at sanctuaries throughout Laconia and Messenia. Such votives were usually offered by individuals whereas temples and other large buildings were normally a communal investment. There seems to have been a spate of temple construction in the second half of the seventh and beginning of the sixth centuries – our main guides to this are the richly decorated terracotta elements from their roofs: disc akroteria, antefixes and probably decorated simas (gutters). The system with simple curving tiles, broader pan and narrower cover, was said to be invented by the Spartans. Common within Laconia and Messenia, the akroteria and antefixes were adopted and imitated across the Peloponnese and beyond: at Mantinea, Olympia, Lousoi, Asea, Bassai, Tegea, Halieis, Poros, Aigina, Kerkyra and as far as Thasos and Asia Minor (Larisa on the Hermos and Neandria) (Förtsch (2001) 210–11). The style's most ambitious expression was in the temple of Hera at Olympia.

Recent excavations at the site of the Menelaion have confirmed that the first temple, which crowned the massive conglomerate podium at the core of the monument, was built in the third quarter of the seventh century BC. Such structures were built at other major sanctuaries such as that of Apollo at Amyklai and also at the shrine of Agamemnon and Alexandra, at Orthia, and Athena Chalkioikos, but also at less prominent sanctuaries such as the 'Heroön', Zeus Messapeus at Tsakona, and a number have been found in rescue excavations in modern Sparta (Förtsch (2001) 208–13). Note also the disc akroteria found by the Greek Archaeological Service: *Archaiologikon Deltion* 53 (1998) 155–7; 52 (1997) 167; 169) as well as at the rural sanctuaries at Aigiai (Bonias 1998) and Kastraki (de la Genière 2005). Even the most important of these were modest buildings – the temple at Artemis Orthia measures only 16m × 7m, very roughly one-eighth of the size of the peripteral temple of Hera at Olympia. The Spartans were aware of the development of stone architecture and the Doric order, as finds such as the early Doric capital from Geronthrai and the sixth-century triglyph from the

Menelaion illustrate, but they had a taste for unusual building designs (such as the Menelaion, the Throne of Apollo at Amyklai, Athena Chalkioikos), exploiting intricate design and valuable materials (copper, ivory, gold) but on a relatively small scale; they eschewed large-scale temple-building projects. There is a marked contrast between Arkadia, where not only were a large number of Archaic temples constructed, but some were quite substantial stone-built peripteral structures (Voyatzis 1999; Nielsen and Roy (2009) 260–2). It is increasingly difficult to explain away the absence of comparable remains from Laconia as an accident of survival.

3.2.2 The city of Sparta

In the archaic period the archaeology of the city of Sparta is still very much one of cult sites and funerary monuments. But the picture of a mere cluster of villages can be overstated. The concentration of finds and major sanctuaries in the area of the acropolis and Limnai (Zavvou and Themis (2009) 112 fig. 11.10) confirms that this was developing as the political centre of Laconia. As in other cities, civic life focused on the agora (its location is much disputed, perhaps it lay on the table of flat land at the south end of the acropolis hill, an area bounded in the second century AD to the south-west by the Roman stoa: Kourinou 2000). It is thought that the agora, initially an assembly point for the army, began to take shape in the eighth century BC. It was the setting for the Choros, where dances for the festival of the Gymnopaïdai took place. It also marked an intersection of roads joining the Aphetai, the main processional route through Sparta leading eventually to Amyklai, and two of the most important early sanctuaries, Athena Chalkioikos and Orthia, placing the agora at the hub of a network of sacred places. Certainly some of the monuments listed by the Roman visitor Pausanias (3.11.2–11) belonged to the sixth century BC including Orestes' grave, housing the bones brought back from Tegea (~560–50 BC), and the Skias, a large structure to house the assembly built by Theodoros of Samos, an expert in massive building projects. Evidently the monument to Olympian Zeus and Aphrodite by the Cretan artist Epimenides also dated to the archaic period.

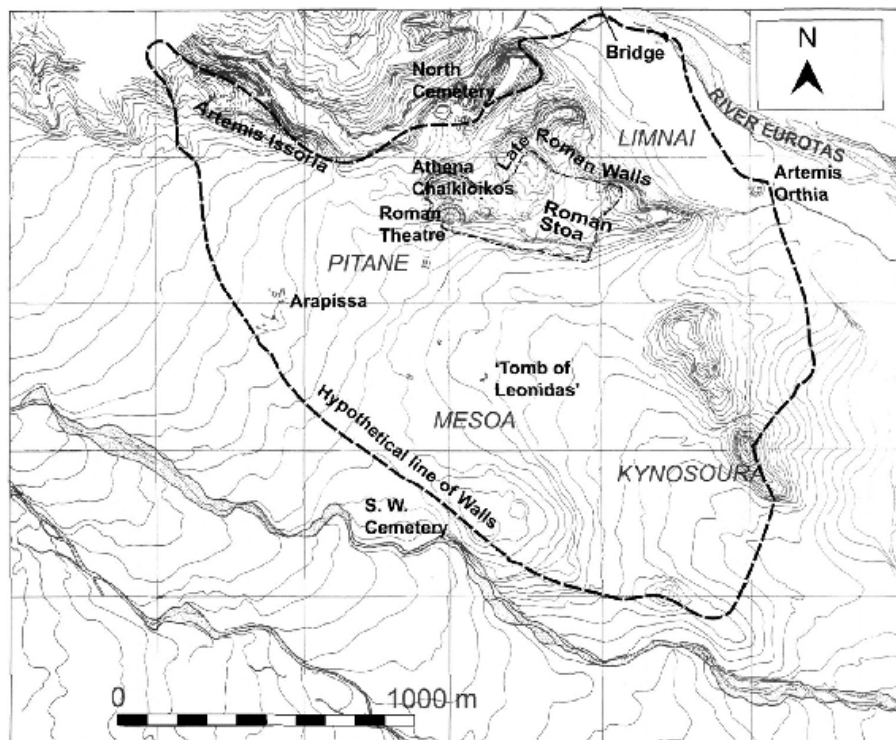


Figure 3.2 Map of ancient Sparta

(based on Raftopoulou 1998, 139, fig 12.23). *Source:* Author.

Domestic buildings of the archaic period are hardly known at all, and our archaeological reconstruction of the city is based almost entirely on burial and sanctuary evidence. Part of one possible house, however, has been excavated close to the Eurotas on the northernmost edge of the city. Excavated in a long narrow trench, four of its walls formed two rooms, 7.5 and 5.5m long respectively, adjoining a courtyard paved with thin schist slabs (Steinhauer (1972) 243). The foundations were of unworked stones; the superstructure would have been made of mudbrick protected by a tiled roof. Such a structure would not be out of place in any other contemporary Greek town.

3.2.3 Burials

A Geometric burial in Sparta seems to have received special attention – a simple crouched inhumation, with a bronze ring on the right hand, it was enclosed within a stone cairn marked by an enclosure wall. Geometric pottery was found around the burial and the area later became a locus for worship; it has produced hundreds of clay figurines, votive plaques, miniature vases and lead votives, from archaic to Hellenistic times. The association of grave and cult finds may be fortuitous, but more likely implies grave cult

(*Archaiologikon Deltion* 51 (1996) 123–5). Elaborate archaic grave ritual has been found elsewhere in Sparta (Raftopoulou 1998, *Archaiologikon Deltion* 50 (1995) Chr. 125); mention is made, in particular, of ‘two storey’ graves where the lower part was used for the primary burial and the upper for gathering the bones of others: collective tombs emphasizing family and descent. One grave held a whole dining set of the second quarter of the sixth century BC, including drinking vessels, plates and a wine jug. After the ceremony all the vases were pierced, to stop them being re-used. The royal cemeteries of the Agiads, on the northwest side of Sparta, and Eurypontids, to the south (Paus. 3.14.2; 3.12.4), which have not been found, may well have set the fashion for grave cult and family cemeteries.

In fact, there was plainly a mixture of beliefs concerning the ancestors and heroes where overlapping and competing group loyalties took different expressions. In the sixth century BC the contrasting examples of the burial of ‘Orestes’ bones’, the hero cult of Chilon (and Lykourgos) (plus the more general phenomenon of the ‘hero reliefs’ and related sculptures on which see [Chapter 6](#)), and the grave cults just mentioned illustrate how the different registers of state policy and family interests were advertised through monuments. Thus, the Orestes story has been interpreted as signalling a change in the Spartans’ self-presentation to the outside world from ‘Dorian’ to ‘Achaian’ (more speculatively also a rebranding of the old cult of Alexandra at Amyklai to include Agamemnon – Cartledge (2002) 120). On the other hand, the ‘hero reliefs’ and perhaps the family tombs underlined the status of distinguished families. Most of the hero reliefs are not inscribed, so it was their context which explained their significance; none has been found unambiguously associated with a cemetery, and it seems wisest to draw a distinction between grave cult and hero cult (though perhaps the royal cemeteries, if only found, would prove different; note the ‘quasi-divinity’ of Spartan kingship noted by Cartledge (1987) 24). All the same, aristocratic families claimed heroic ancestry, and consequently a dedication presented as an act of piety in fact vaunted the status of the dedicators. Interestingly the reliefs have been found throughout Laconia indicating how the *Perioikoi* followed Spartan customs and attitudes. Rarely, Olympic victors also received heroic cult, specifically Hipposthenes (Paus. 3.15.7) and Chionis (Christesen 2010).

3.2.4 Inscriptions and literacy

Δεῖνι[ς] τὰ<ν>δ' ἀνέθηκε χάρι[ν] [Φελέναι] Μενελάῳ

Deinis dedicated this as a [?grace to Helen (wife)?] of Menelaos.

This damaged inscription (the above restoration is very speculative: the word in square brackets is a guess) was incised onto the rim and handle of a bronze perfume jug found at the sanctuary of Helen and Menelaos just outside Sparta. Experts differ over the date (Catling and Cavanagh 1976; Stibbe (2000) 22; Jeffery (1990) 448) but 625–600 BC might be a reasonable compromise. One or two inscriptions from Artemis Orthia may be earlier, but the earliest are still a century later than the first known Greek alphabetical inscriptions from elsewhere. This is probably an accident of survival, and whilst Sparta played no part in the introduction of the alphabet, it participated in the spread of literacy. The style of writing, known as the ‘red’ script, is shared by Messenia, Elis, Arkadia and the E. Argolid, and related to alphabets used in Phokis, Lokris and Thessaly. Spartan officials, the Pythioi, wrote down Delphic oracles, and such a link between Sparta and Delphi in Phokis may explain the similarity of style between these areas (Jeffery (1990) 185). The oracles were stored by the Spartan kings, whose archive could also have preserved other documents such as the Great Rhetra, arguably Sparta’s earliest surviving law. The creations of the great seventh-century poets, Tyrtaios, Alkman and Terpanndros, were also written down. So literacy was quickly embedded into the religious, political and cultural life of Laconia – Deinis’ hexameter (if we are right to restore it thus) reflects the cultivated milieu of the time. (For the uses of literacy in archaic Greece see Wilson 2009.)

Whilst Spartan education is traditionally linked with physical training, the ability to read and write was a requirement for Spartan society; a strong corrective to the stereotype of Spartan hostility to learning has been argued by Millender (2001). The inscriptions which do survive from the archaic period are very similar to those from elsewhere in Greece: dedications to the gods of votives, armour and prizes; vase inscriptions and signatures; dedications with lists of victories at the games; the seat at Olympia for Gorgos, proxenos to the Elians. Administrative documents are known later, and note Beattie’s ingenious restoration of an inscription recorded in the early eighteenth century AD from near Amyklai as a sacred law (Beattie 1951); moreover a list from Geronthrai may record the names of officials (Wachter 2000). Just as in other parts of the Greek world, it seems that craftsmen could also read and write: inscriptions are found on Laconian vases (Wachter (2001) 159–65), masons’ names carved at Amyklai (Jeffery (1990) 200 no. 32), the letters used to help assemble the Vix krater (the massive and beautiful bronze bowl found in France) are probably Laconian and the recently published Hermesios inscription shows a Lacedaemonian bronze-smith signing his work (Catling 2010).

3.2.5 Rural settlement

From the archaic period onwards it is clear that the immediate hinterland of Sparta, like many other parts of Greece, became covered by a dense network of small farmsteads and hamlets (Figure 3.3); in some parts of Greece this process started already in the eighth century, in others rather later. In Laconia the main surge in this agricultural reorganization began in the sixth century BC, and may reflect the increasing stability of the Spartan state; but perhaps also, if the speculation is correct that before 600 BC ownership of land was especially concentrated in the hands of a few, the beginning of a new balance between richer and poorer. From the beginning, these scattered farms show a range in size and prosperity reflecting the varying status of those who owned and worked them. The arguments are finely balanced on whether some or all belonged to Spartan citizens or to the *Perioikoi*, but they certainly cannot be equated with the traditional lots (*klēroi*), which Hellenistic and Roman writers, notably Plutarch, considered central to Spartiate landholdings. Historians of an earlier generation thought that the land around Sparta was divided into equal *klēroi*, but more recent historical research has cast serious doubt on the reliability of such views (Hodkinson (2000) esp. 65–112). The archaeology of intensive survey has gone a long way to support the recent, sceptical analysis. In fact, similar farmsteads have been found in many different parts of mainland Greece, the islands and in the territories of Greek colonies overseas, though the exact pattern of their development varies from one city-state to another (Catling 2002, 156–7).

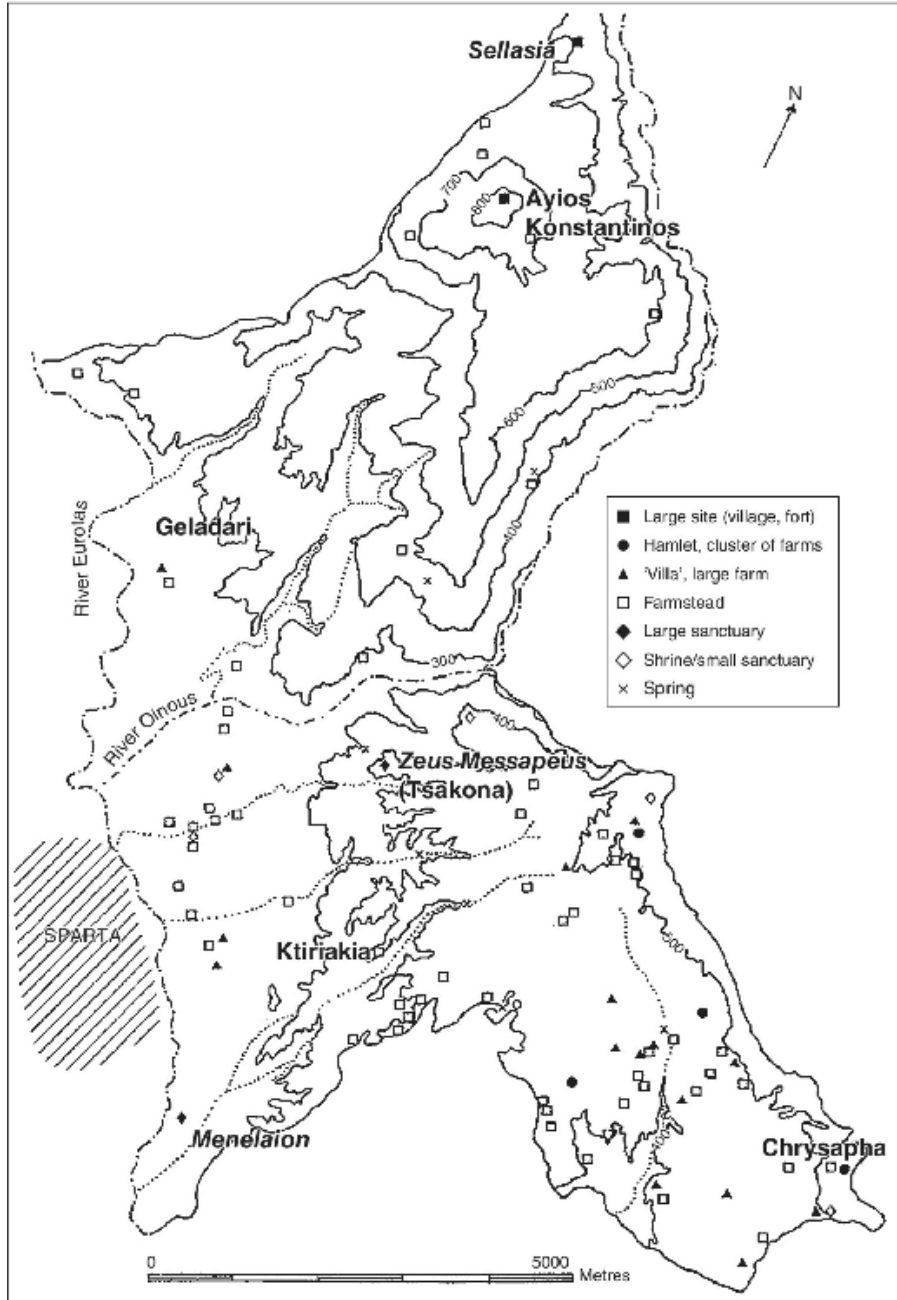


Figure 3.3 Map of archaic and early classical rural sites in east central Laconia, just east of Sparta

(after Cavanagh et al. (2002) 158, ill. 5.2). *Source:* Author.

Recent extensive survey in other parts of Laconia (around Vasara and Veroia in the north of Laconia (Themos 2002) around Boia in the SE (Zavvou 2002; 2007) and in the Mani peninsula (Moschou)) has shown that a scatter of small

villages and farmsteads is also characteristic of perioikic Laconia in the archaic and classical periods. The Helos plain, however, according to the most recent archaeological review, had a nucleated centre, but evidently was cultivated by Helots living scattered throughout the region (Themos 2007; however see also Hope Simpson and Janko 2011 for counter – arguments). The Kythera Island Project has uncovered classical sites (in a broad sense) varying in size from farmsteads to villages, but preliminary analysis indicates a paucity or absence of rural settlement from the end of the Mycenaean period until the sixth century BC. A contrast has been recognized in the classical sites between ‘small dispersed inland sites, characterized almost exclusively by coarse wares, obviously production oriented, and the large coastal sites around Kastri, rich in fine decorated, but also imported, pottery, mainly consumption oriented’ (Broodbank in *Archaeological Reports* 52 (2005–6) 17). Thus, whilst the sixth-century expansion seems to be characteristic of the whole of Laconia, the system of agricultural exploitation may well have differed from one area to another. On the basis of a mathematical analysis, it has been argued that the structure of rural settlement in Laconia, and hence the organization of its agricultural economy, differed quite radically from that of contemporary Athens and was more like that in other parts of the Peloponnese (Cavanagh 2009).

Archaeological survey in Messenia has presented a very different picture of rural settlement for the archaic and classical periods: a nucleation of population, which implies yet another pattern of exploitation of the countryside. Note, also, the large, complex, archaic building at the site of Kopanaki, in Messenia, which produced large storage jars, loom weights and other finds indicative of rural production (Kaltsas 1983). In this respect the rural settlement of the region subject to Sparta stands in contrast not only to that in the Sparta basin but to that in much of the rest of Greece. The helots of Messenia evidently lived in small village communities, not in isolated farmsteads. Some have seen this as a paradox: why should the Spartans have allowed their natural enemies to live united in enclaves rather than in weak isolation? Only by grouping the workforce into villages, it has been argued, could a subject population be maintained without a permanent military presence; it may imply some degree of self-regulation through helot ‘bailiffs’ or ‘managers’, but the village communities were self-perpetuating and viable (Alcock et al. (2005) 172).

3.2.6 Trade and industry

The conventional view is that trade and industry were in the hands of the *Perioikoi* and that the Spartans did not engage in banausic occupations (for the classical period see Herodotos 2.167). But we know that there were rich

Spartan as well as perioikic landowners who would have needed, at the very least, to realize their agricultural surpluses and who patronized the skilled craftsmen of the period; so they had an interest in trade and exchange. Alkman's poetry, archaeological finds and the scenes on the pottery of the period illustrate a taste for luxury (see [Chapter 5](#) by Pipili, and [Chapters 8 and 9](#) by Van Wees, this volume) including Lydian millinery, which was all the rage in the seventh century BC, gold jewellery, ivory, and perhaps foreign, thoroughbred horses, if Alkman's similes were taken from a Spartan reality (Alk. 1 51, 59, Venetic, Kolaxaian and Ibenian horses, respectively from N. Italy, Scythia and Lydia).

Oil and wine (and other commodities) were shipped throughout the ancient world using transport amphorae, which are, therefore, a useful indicator of trade and exchange. Unfortunately, the study of Laconian amphorae is still at an early stage as their distinctive form has only recently been distinguished and much further work is needed – outside Sparta they have been found widely in Italy from Etruria in the north to Sicily in the south, as well as in Greece from Crete, Olympia and Athens (Johnston (2005) 364; Stibbe (2000) 70–2, 163–7; Pelagatti 1992). We can be confident that more will be identified in the future giving a valuable index of the trade in bulk agricultural commodities during especially the sixth and fifth centuries BC.

The metal mineral wealth of Laconia is concentrated in the perioikic area in SE Laconia. Again, there is still much research to be done. We know that the iron resources near Boia were extensively worked, certainly from the classical period and quite probably earlier, from mines and the remains of slag, clay bellows' nozzles, tappings and a possible washery associated with black-glazed pottery (Bassiakos et al. 1989: Agios Elissaios mine, Neapolis, Palaiokastros; Kiskyra 1988 reports iron deposits from a much wider area of Laconia). Exploitable deposits of lead, silver and copper have also been reported (Angelopoulos and Konstantinidis 1988; Bassiakos 1988). It has been suggested, on the basis of lead isotope analysis, that the lead used for the little figurines came from Attika (Gill and Vickers), but as we do not know the isotopic signature for the Laconian ores the case is still open (Stos-Gale and Gale 1984).

The metal industries in Laconia were important from the eighth–sixth centuries BC not only for producing reliefs, figures, figurines, vessels, jewellery and trappings, but also for arming the Spartan warriors. In the archaic period a fully equipped hoplite would wear a corselet of bronze, tailored for the individual, carry spears and a sword, a shield, and wear a bronze helmet. Linen corselets came into Greece in the sixth century BC and the Pharaoh Amasis sent an example to Sparta in the middle of that century, though in Laconian art the bronze type continues to be portrayed. In the classical period it seems much lighter materials were preferred (Snodgrass (1967) 90–8); for accidental reasons, we know more about Laconian armour

from representations (hoplite figurines, reliefs in clay and bronze (not least the Vix krater), the leads) than actual finds, but its school of brilliant metalsmiths was certainly also of importance to the Spartan military.

Stone quarries are widely distributed, though with a good number close to the coast on the Tainaron and Malea peninsulas, for transport by sea; those of Tainaron included Marinari or Marmari said to have supplied Bassai, and the coloured marbles, notably the rosso antico quarries (Moschou et al. 1998; Christien, this work, Vol. 2 [Chapter 24](#)); those for the famous *lapis laedaemonius* of Krokeai, slightly inland, were particularly important in the Roman Imperial period. Closer to Sparta the quarries at Gynaika were probably already exploited in the archaic period for *perirrhantēria* (stone fonts); whilst those high in Taygetos (800 m) at Platyvouni, near Sochas, are thought to have supplied stone for the Eleusinion at Kalyvia Sochas, for Amyklai, for the Roman theatre at Sparta and perhaps even Roman buildings at Messene. Traces of the cart-tracks for transporting stone down the mountain have been found. The massive sarcophagi favoured by the wealthy citizens of Roman Sparta, Gytheion and elsewhere were trundled from quarries like those at Asopos, exploited from the late Hellenistic period onwards (Kokkorou-Alevras et al. 2009).

Other significant sources of income include purple dye manufacture, associated with Kythera and S. Malea (Coldstream and Huxley (1972) 38–9), logging on Taygetos and Parnon, and products such as salt (Bakourou (2004) 103–5), honey, flax and wool. It is symptomatic of the unevenness of our sources that more is known of these industries in the Bronze Age than in the classical period. The clearest evidence for the widespread practice of weaving is the occurrence of loom weights at small rural sites (Overbeek (1996) 186–9); two basic varieties are conical and pyramidal and they span the whole period from Archaic through Roman – different sizes and weights may correspond with varying ply of thread, though the majority found on the Laconia Survey were of a fairly standard size (6–9cm high); perhaps we can take that to mean that most domestic weaving was of a fairly unspecialized nature. Larger collections of loom weights from Sparta itself might point to more industrial production in the late Hellenistic and Roman period (*Archaiologikon Deltion* 52B (1997) 169; 51B (1996) 118–20; 49B (1994) 170; 23B (1968) 151). Spindle whorls also witness this widespread domestic activity.

3.3 The Classical Period c.500–300 BC

3.3.1 Monuments and dedications

Φωρθείαι τὰδ' Ἄρ[ή]ξιππος νικῶν ἀνέσθηκε

ἐν συνόδοις πα[ί]δων πᾶσιν ἁορῆν φανερά

Arexippos set up these (sickles) to Wortheia plain for all to see, being victorious in the boys' choral competitions.

The modest size of the early Laconian temples seems just as characteristic of classical monuments in the region. The very uncertainty of Sparta's fiscal resources coupled with her apparent unease at the private or even royal patronage of public monuments, may go some way to explain the unimposing appearance of the classical city. State patronage and booty from the Persian war did see the erection of the Persian Stoa in the agora at Sparta – like the Serpent Tripod at Delphi part of Sparta's propaganda to appropriate to herself the glory of the Greek victory over the Persians. The Persian gold and silver won at Plataia achieved an almost mythical fame, and explains how the victory monuments were financed; just as Kroisos's gold had paid for the monuments of two generations before (Tomlinson 2008). In this context, the dispute over Pausanias's epigram under the tripod at Delphi reveals the power of such dedications to touch a nerve: Pausanias claimed that he was the leader of the Greeks who annihilated the Persians – usually such votives were made in the name of the nation, not an individual, and the Lakedaimonians immediately chiselled out Pausanias' name and had inscribed, instead, the list of the cities who had taken part in the campaign (Thuc. 1.132). At Sparta itself the monument raised on the acropolis (Paus. 3.14.1; cf. Hdt. 7.224) named equally all the dead at Thermopylai (and their fathers' names), the grandest of the *en polemōi* ('in war') inscriptions (sceptics would date the inscription to the Roman period). Two of the heroes of Thermopylai, Maron and Alpheios, had their own hero shrine on the south side of Sparta, presumably a family rather than a state cult (Paus. 3.12.9; Hdt. 7.227).

Increasingly, however, Spartan royals and generals came to play the political game of vainglorious dedications at international sanctuaries (Palagia 2009). This tendency may have grown out of the hero- and tomb-cults of the preceding period. Regent Pausanias and his fellow hero of the Persian wars king Leonidas, safely dead for a generation or two, were 'reburied' on the acropolis by the sanctuary of Athena Chalkioikos and became the focus of an annual festival – the Leonidea (again the festival may be a Roman invention). Herodotos seems to refer to a private monument in honour of Diēnekēs, the most heroic of those who died at Thermopylai (7.227). Other monuments show that the leading Spartan families exploited grave and hero cult for

political propaganda: Brasidas was honoured with a cenotaph at Sparta (Paus. 3.14.1), as well as a tomb and heroön at Amphipolis in northern Greece with yearly honours (Thuc. 5.11.1), Lysandros' self-aggrandizement saw greater excess, but outside Sparta: divine honours on Samos, statues at Delphi. He was eventually buried at Panopeus in Phocis a few kilometres from Chaironeia, but thereafter appears not to have been honoured at Sparta. In contrast, king Agesilaos II, rather than celebrate Lysandros, his political patron but social inferior, raised in Sparta a heroön to his royal sister Kyniska (Millender this work [Chapter 17](#) and forthcoming). In a less spectacular way the scattered cemeteries within Sparta continued in use: a series of marble urns holding cremations or human bones started in the late classical and continued into the Hellenistic and Roman periods (Raftopoulou (1998) 136; Poupaki (2009)). Finds of similar urns in the north of Laconia at Vassara and near Boia in the south (Zavvou (2002) 213) illustrate again the customs shared by perioikic Laconia and Sparta. Very recently, however, an organized cemetery (sixth to third century BC) has been found on the SW edge of Sparta; horse burials were found annexed to some of the graves. Vases, of a type unparalleled elsewhere, together with many drinking vessels indicate that funerary feasts took place.

The festivals illustrate a side of Spartan religion which helps correct the impression of a dull city with inconspicuous monuments, by drawing our attention to the importance of performance. The emphasis on performed ritual can be traced back to earlier times through scenes on geometric pottery, the poetry of Alkman, the padded dancers and musicians represented on the lead votives and on Laconian pottery, and the clay masks which started in the archaic but continued in use into the classical period. These last depicted not only wrinkled old men and women ([Figure 3.4](#)), but young men and warriors and probably gorgons and satyrs as well; they imitated the originals worn in theatrical performances of a religious nature. Indeed the written sources inform us that there was a theatre in classical Sparta, though its remains have not been uncovered. Processions were a spectacular part of festivals, carriages or floats (*kannathra*) decorated with griffins and other mythical beasts and gaily decorated horses could grace the parades (Jordan 1988).

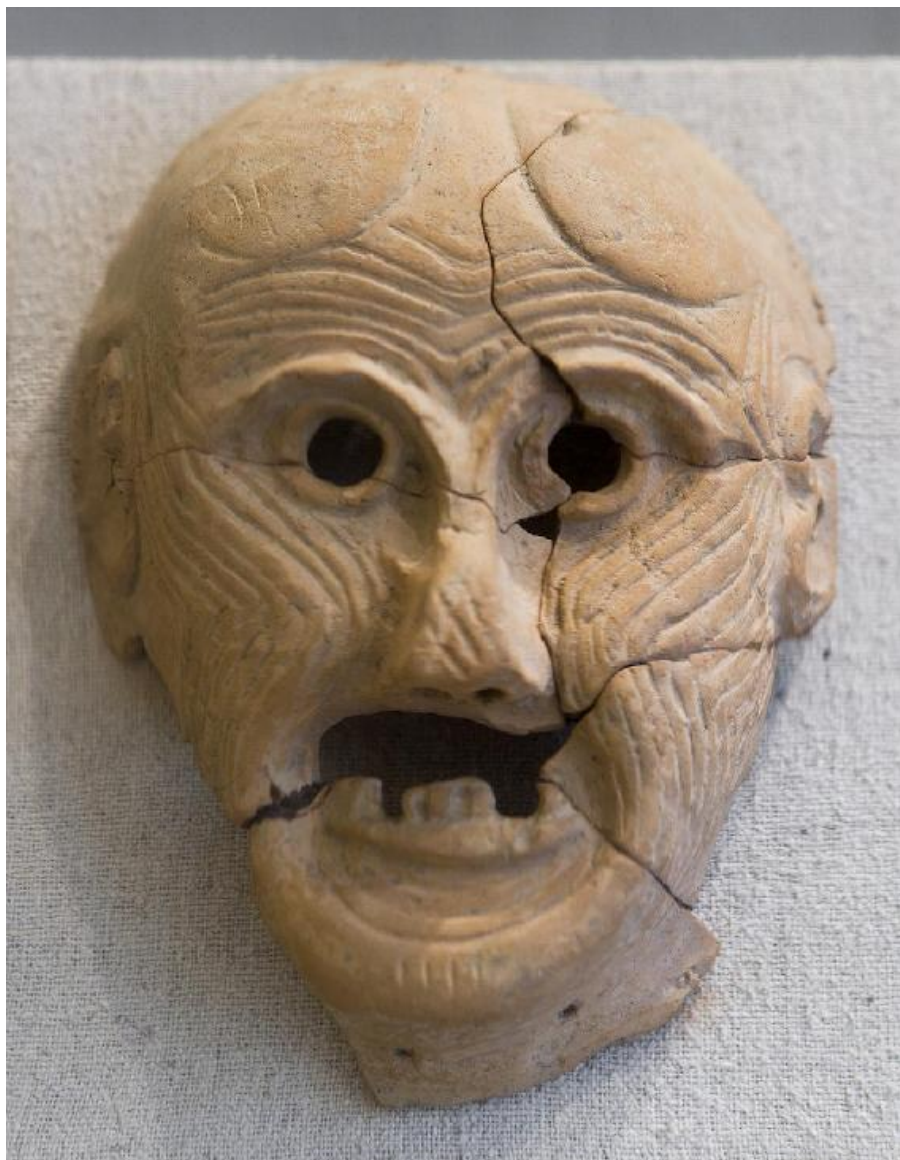


Figure 3.4 Grotesque clay mask from the shrine of Artemis Orthia; now in Archaeological Museum, Sparta.

Source: © Vanni Archive/Art Resource, NY.

The curious ambiguity over the kinds of display acceptable or unacceptable in Spartan society can also be observed in public dedications and inscriptions. Archaeology confirms the tradition that, in marked contrast with the custom in other Greek cities, funerary inscriptions were reserved only for those men who had died in war (and controversially (see Hodkinson (2000) 260–2; Brulé and Piolot (2004) for women in childbirth); very modest plaques (not gravestones, the war dead were buried on the battlefield) inscribed

respectively, for each sex, *en polemōi* or *en lechoi* have been found, mainly in or near Sparta, but also in perioikic towns (Low 2006). A few grave stones earlier in date than the Hellenistic period were evidently of foreigners who had died in Laconia (the grave of the Iamidai, citizens by adoption, was seen by Pausanias (3.12.8)). On the other hand, votaries could vaunt their names on offerings to the gods and with records of victories in athletic contests, inscribing equipment, such as jumping weights, prizes such as Panathenaic amphorae, and stelai such as that from Geronthrai (*IG* V.1. 1120) or the bombastic list of victories recorded by Damonon at the sanctuary of Athena Chalkioikos. The earliest surviving inscription recording the prizes won in the children's *Paidikos Agōn* at Artemis Orthia has been dated to the early fourth century BC – Arexippos dedicated five sickles to Orthia on winning the choral competition for boys. Even so, the Spartans viewed athletic success with a similar ambivalence and set limits to its advertisement (Hodkinson 1999), but also pushed at those limits (Christesen 2010). One can sense a tension between the celebration of individual achievement, wealth and family ambition against a theoretical equality under the rule of law and the kings.

At the more humble end of the spectrum of votive offerings we find that those types of simple offering which had been particularly distinctive of Spartan cult – the leads and the clay figurines – gave way, from the fifth century BC, to forms which were standard through most of the Greek world: vases, mould-made figurines and lamps.

For the appearance of Sparta and other urban sites in the classical period the gaps in the archaeological coverage are serious. We have seen above that the Spartan agora received monuments such as the Persian stoa, and Xenophon's account of the conspiracy of Kinadon c.399 BC (*Hell.* 3.3.5) makes it plain that the agora was large: it held 4000 going about their daily business. Herodotos' description of royal funerals also indicates open space where thousands could assemble (*Hdt.* 6.58). Like most classical cities Sparta was not a dense mass of houses: there were large open public spaces. Pausanias mentions an area, separate from the official agora, with stoas (evidently shops) where small items had been traded. This could have been post-classical, though in any case apparently out of use in his day (*Paus.* 3.13.6); certainly, the well-stocked ironmongers described by Xenophon in the same passage (*Hell.* 3.3.5) show that classical Sparta served as a market for the surrounding countryside.

Although there were individual dedications at the sanctuaries, temple architecture continued to be remarkably understated. Other public arenas must have existed: for example, we know from the lists of games celebrated that there were hippodromes and stadia; the Dromos running track at Sparta has not been found, whilst Euripides mentioned the stadia and palaistra where both boys and girls exercised (*Andr.* 595–600). The Roman Eurykles built one of the gymnasia here, but Pausanias mentions several (*Paus.* 3.14.6); on the

other hand, it is thought that the artificial island at Platanistas was Hellenistic in date (Kennell 1995).

3.3.2 Communication and infrastructure

Traces of the ancient network of roads have survived widely throughout Laconia (and elsewhere in Greece) in the form of pairs of grooves cut into the rock, set to a standard gauge of 1.4m apart. It appears that they were carved to prevent vehicles from sliding. Scattered here and there throughout the countryside they are difficult to date, our only guide being the dates of the settlements they connect. Our knowledge of the road network has been extended in recent years especially thanks to the work of Christien (1989) and this work, Vol. 2 [Chapter 24](#); Christien and Spyropoulos 1985) and Pikoulas (1995, 1999, 2012). It is agreed that the roads go back to the classical, indeed to the archaic period, and they probably served both military (*Xen. Lak. Pol.* 11.2) and non-military uses, enabling heavy carts to transport agricultural produce, timber, stone and even prisoners. Bottle-shaped cisterns found in some cases alongside such roads would have supplied water for men and animals. The tracks have been found high in the mountains of Taygetos and Parnon, serving to link Sparta not only with landholdings throughout its territory, but also with neighbouring states.

Bridges there must also have been, but they survive only rarely. The foundations of the main bridge over the Eurotas into the north of Sparta survive today; the superstructure recorded in the early nineteenth century is probably medieval. Another important bridge, serving the road from Sparta to Gytheion, crossed the Magoulitsa – perhaps on the site of the modern bridge or possibly that sketched by Leake ((1830) vol.1. 157). It may have been of classical date (Kourinou (2000) 78–88); traces of a similar bridge, thought to be Hellenistic, have also been found to the west, in Magoula (Kourinou and Pikoulas 2009). The example at Xerokambi, in the foothills of Taygetos, also constructed of squared stone blocks, has been dated to the Hellenistic period; a bridge of similar construction at Koskaraga, Sotirianika lies on the western side of the mountain (Kalamara 2004; doubts have been raised and these blocks may be later).

Much was made of the fact that Sparta itself was not defended with town walls until the Hellenistic period, her military prowess being protection enough. But the Spartans were not entirely unguarded. The discovery of archaic pottery on the dominant hill of Ayios Konstantinos, less than 10 km away, suggests some sort of military presence, perhaps initially a watchpost, for the walled fortress there must indeed belong to a later period; the fortification at Chartzenikos in the Skiritis may have had a similar history. There are also hints that acropolis sites vulnerable to attack from the sea, such

as Kythera town, were walled already in the fifth century BC. Thucydides mentions the Spartans' efforts to fortify the eastern coast, specifically the acropolis and harbour of Thyrea (Thuc. 4.57), and Epidauros Limera's territory was attacked by the Athenians a number of times. The walls at the latter site (Figure 3.5) cannot be dated precisely but probably belong to the fifth or fourth centuries BC; they are roughly 850m long and enclose about four hectares.

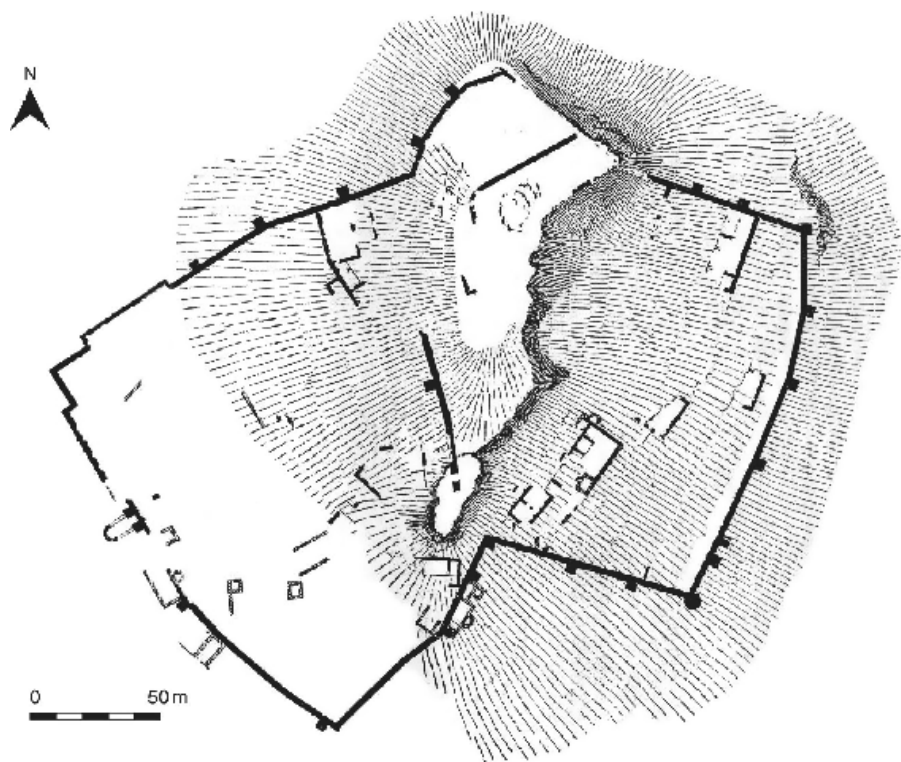


Figure 3.5 The fortified perioikic settlement of Epidauros Limera. The walls are thought to be classical, though their precise date is uncertain.

(After Wace and Hasluck (1907–08) 180 fig. 3). *Source*: Author.

We know that Gytheion, where the Spartans had their dockyards, was walled before 370 BC (Xen. *Hell.* 6.5.32) and the recent excavations at Geronthrai have revealed a late classical phase in the fortifications with an outer revetment of unworked field stones and a walkway of closely packed cobbles (MacVeagh Thorne and Prent 2009).

3.3.3 Rural settlement

In the area to the east of Sparta, investigated through surface survey, the estates and farms continued to flourish, though in the later classical period

there was a tendency for the number of smaller sites to dwindle, evidently to the advantage of the larger estates. This consolidation of settlement probably saw greater diversification in the economy of the enlarged estates coupled with, at least in some parts, small holdings on the margin of subsistence viability (Catling (2002) esp. 198–9). We still know frustratingly little from their archaeology about the perioikic cities of Laconia in the classical period. Shipley (1997) has summarized the broad configuration ([Figures 3.6–3.7](#): these maps should be viewed with great caution because the location of many of the perioikic cities is very uncertain as is the status of many as cities (*poleis*) in the classical period; see also [Chapter 23](#) by Ducat in the present work. Some cases whose location is also obscure have been omitted: Chen, Oinous, Alagonia, Hypsoi, Iasos, Leukai, Pyrrhichos and Tenos.) A band of borderland regions (Thyreatis, Skiritis, Belminatis, Aigytiis, Dentheliatis – plus perhaps Maleatis, Kynouria) which contained a few, small perioikic *poleis* may have been treated as regions rather than as town + territory. Those perioikic towns whose size we can estimate, from survey evidence or from the line of their fortifications, cover an area of 3–5 ha (Sellasia 3 ha, Epidauros Limera 4 ha, Zarax 3.7 ha, Geronthrai 3.8 ha; Akriai may have reached 7–8 ha: Catling (2002) 246–8). This seems tiny compared with, for example, contemporary towns in Arkadia (Tegea ~ 190 ha, Mantinea 124 ha, Asea 25 ha: Forsén 2000), though they are of a similar size, for example, to Attic demes such as Rhamnous (3.4 ha). On the other hand, towns such as Gytheion and Boia, for whose size we have no information, may have been much larger.

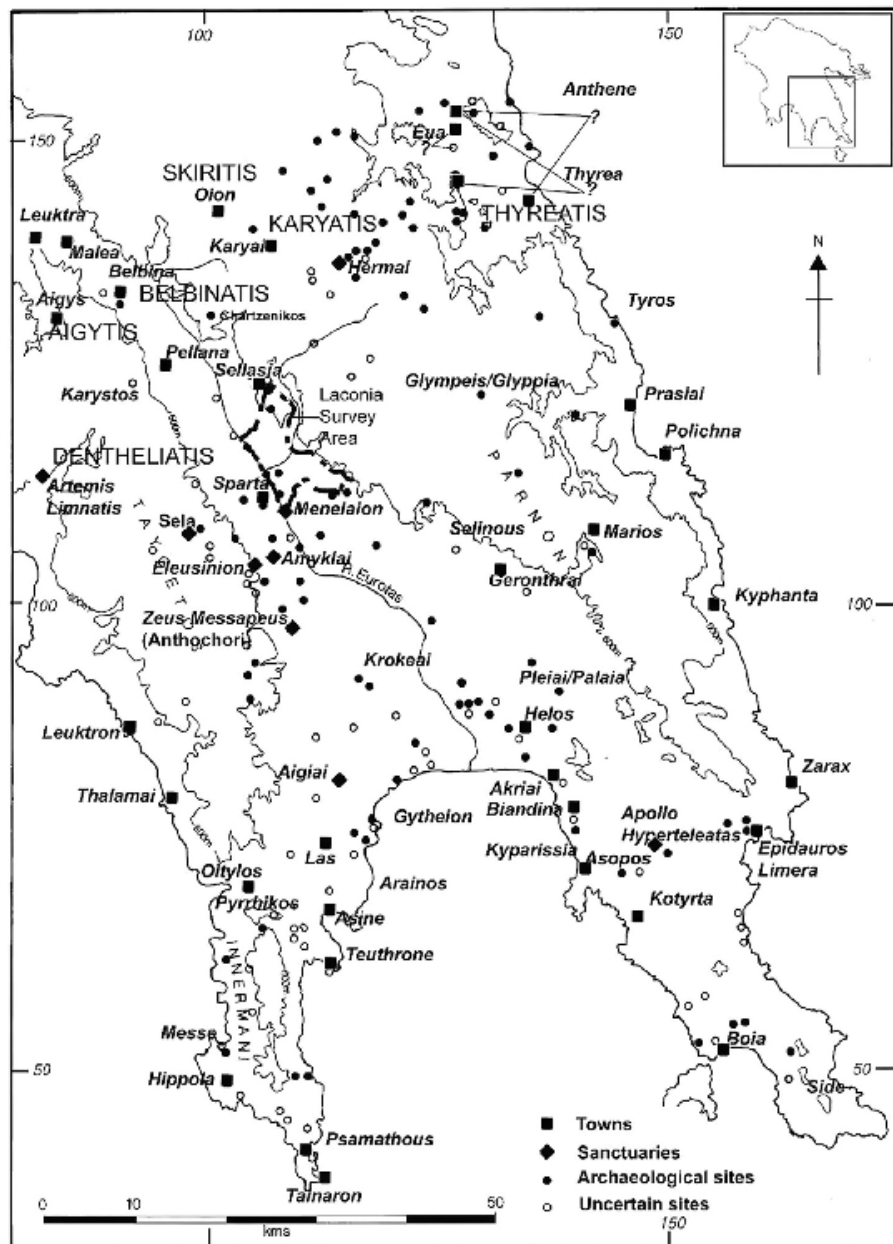


Figure 3.6 Map of sites of the classical period in Laconia

(after Shipley (1996) catalogue and 230, ill. 23.5) with probable perioikic towns (Shipley 1996; Pikoulas 1988).

See also Ducat, [Chapter 23](#), this work. *Source:* Author.

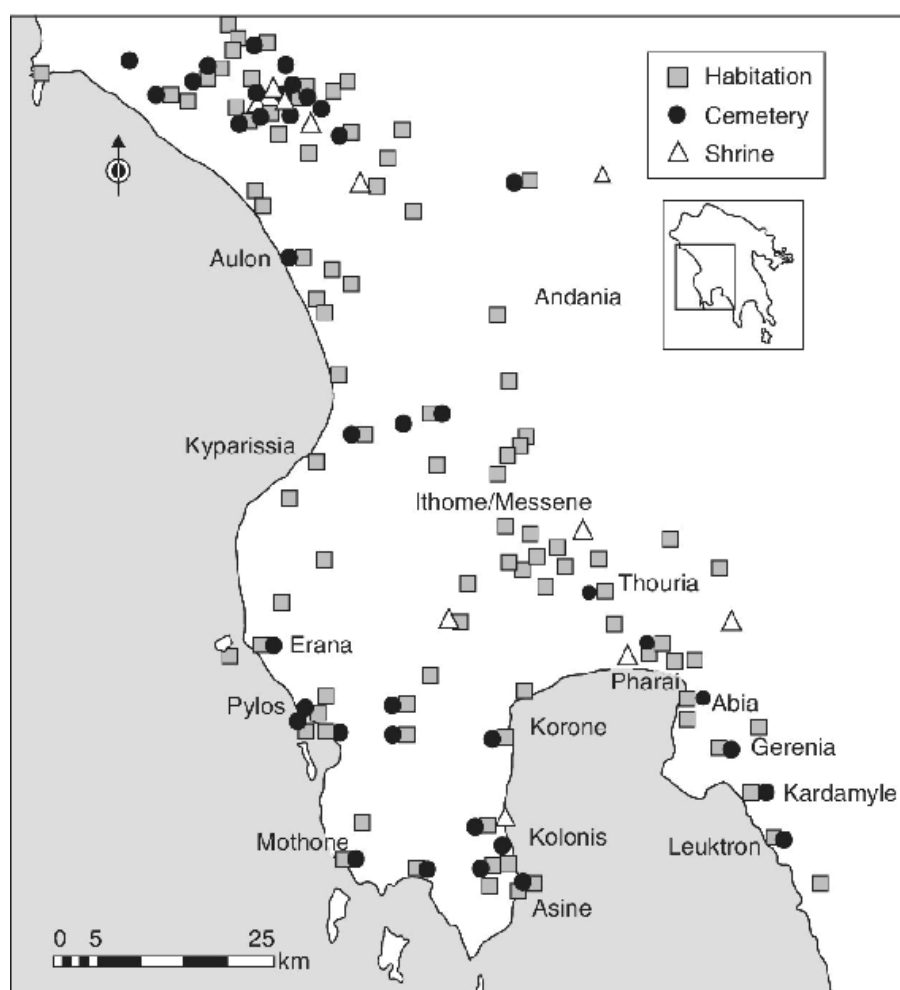


Figure 3.7 Distribution map of settlements, cemeteries and sanctuaries of classical date in Messenia.

(After Alcock et al. (2005 160) fig. 5 and Shipley 1997.) *Source:* Author.

The results of extensive survey in Messenia (Figure 3.7) are hard to interpret, as the imprecise dating of all surface material makes it difficult to distinguish sites occupied before or after the liberation of the area from Spartan control. All the same, archaeology suggests that the pattern established in the archaic period continued but with an increased number of settlements; and much the same seems to be true of Kythera. Thus in all three sectors where we have survey evidence a pattern set in the sixth century BC continued over 200–300 years, though with a different settlement structure in each.

Curious rural structures, whose true function is far from clear, are the Peloponnesian ‘pyramids’ (at Viglaphia (Fracchia 1985) and Kastria (Zavvou 2002, 213–4)), which have been compared with the tower houses found elsewhere in classical Greece (Nevett 2005; Morris and Papadopoulos 2005).

3.4 The Hellenistic and Roman Periods c.300 BC–AD 400

3.4.1 *Urban archaeology*

For largely accidental reasons we have, in Laconia, a clearer view of town dwellings in the Hellenistic and Roman periods than in the earlier phases. The picture from Sparta itself is particularly complex, because it has grown out of hundreds of small excavations heroically carried out by the Greek Archaeological Service in advance of building developments throughout the modern town (see Panagiotopoulou 2009; for a useful overview see Zavvou and Themis 2009). The construction of the fortification walls seems to have had a radical effect in the process of urbanization at Sparta, though one that has been characterized as transitional. The walls, replacing the earlier ditch and palisade, were constructed in the third century BC and regularly refurbished thereafter – only parts of the circuit survive and its exact course will probably never be recovered, but very roughly the perimeter of the wall was 7.5 km (Polybius estimated 48 stades $\approx$ 8.8 km) and it enclosed an area a little less than 300 ha (larger, therefore, than the Arcadian cities mentioned above).

It appears that the building of the walls helped the rather dispersed pattern of the classical period to coalesce into a single city, though without, to begin with, a contiguous plan. New streets were laid down supported by stone revetments and with surfaces made up of clay, pebbles and tile fragments, extending the network which had served the classical city. Clay pipes indicate new care in securing the water supply, though at the same time wells continued not only to supply private houses, but were also located in open areas, evidently to serve the more general public. The finer houses had floors decorated with pebble mosaics: a Triton with sea creatures and Dionysiac scenes, a feline attacking a bull, and a lion and a procession of animals (Salzman 1982; Panagiotopoulou 1998). No doubt king Nabis's royal residence (Livy 35.36.1 'regia'; Cartledge and Spawforth (1989) 69) was decorated with such refinements. As we shall see, large organized extramural cemeteries also followed the construction of the walls, though intramural burial continued. All the same there were open areas which were evidently not built on at all: thus the much later Roman bath building 'Arapissa' was constructed on undeveloped land within the walled circuit.

More pretentious public buildings in Hellenistic cities were often constructed

under the patronage of the powerful kings who succeeded to parts of Alexander the Great's empire. Sparta seems to have enjoyed less than her fair share, though we know from excavation, inscriptions and historical references of some public buildings: public baths (Polyb. 25.7.5: in 180 BC Chairon had Apollonidas assassinated as he left the baths), a building called Machanidai (Cartledge and Spawforth (1989) 66, 218), and the moated island at Platanistas which was probably a Hellenistic creation (Kennell (1995) 56–7); it was here that teams of Spartan youths pushed, kicked and bit each other until one side ended up in the ditch.

A lower register of sophistication has been recognized in the perioikic settlement at Geronthrai. Here too the construction of the Hellenistic defensive circuit seems to have led to a reorganization of the houses. A narrow street passed between the blocks of houses, which consisted of a poorer, less carefully constructed quarter, next to a slightly better area, where the houses had the open courtyards normal in classical and Hellenistic houses. The masonry and layout of the houses were rather simple using unworked stones for foundations, mud brick superstructure, plastered walls, beaten earth or clay floors and tiled roofs. Finds included terracotta loom weights (e.g. fourteen from one room), cooking pots, amphorae, pithoi; a small smithy was suggested by traces of burning and a small iron anvil (Crouwel et al. 2003, 11). The cult centre of the settlement continued to be maintained, including the temple of Apollo Geronthratis (Shipley 2007).

3.4.2 The countryside

There may have been fluctuations in the occupation of the countryside during the troubled years of the Hellenistic period. Sparta's loss of Messenia in the fourth century may have led to an increase in smallholdings in Laconia, but by the later part of the Hellenistic period it is plain that the numbers of sites in east-central Laconia had declined dramatically (Shipley 2002). This Late Hellenistic decline is part of a general phenomenon found through most of Greece, and to that extent is a reflection of a more general transformation than can be attributed to factors at Sparta alone. After a careful appraisal of the evidence, both archaeological and historical, Alcock concluded that there was a growth in estate size and a concentration of land ownership in Late Hellenistic and Early Roman Greece ((1993) 33–92) leading to a neglect of marginal land. The latter was perhaps given over more to extensive pastoralism, with a concentration on exploiting the more productive arable in the deeper, well-watered soils. This general picture is confirmed for Sparta (Shipley 2002) and lends credence to the literary sources which depict a continuing decline in the number of Spartan citizens, the toll of long periods of warfare, the confiscation of land belonging to political exiles, a stubborn

resistance to attempts at land reform and redistribution, and concentration of land holdings through marriage alliances. The process seems to start already in the late classical period and continued into the Roman imperial period.

The rural decline can be set against urban consolidation to judge from Sparta and Geronthrai (though at least one of the smaller country towns was also affected: Sellasia, the perioikic settlement founded in the sixth century BC, seems not to have survived the second century BC. Close to the frontier, it may have been too exposed to raids in those uncertain times). Pellana, on the other hand, has Hellenistic and Roman finds (Spyropoulos 2002), in spite of Pausanias' implying that the city was abandoned (3.21.2). Pausanias also tells us that six of the twenty-four Eleutherolaconian cities had not survived to his day (3.21.7), though it seems these declined during the Roman period (e.g. Kotyrta and Hippola (Shipley (1996) 311, 304, 285; Bölte (1913) 182, 237).

As we have just seen, Sparta's decline to a petty power in the large world of the Hellenistic kingdoms, combined with the loss of her territory, saw a transformation in her economic structure, but also that reinvention of her past characterized as the Spartan Mirage (see also [Chapter 1](#) in this volume). These almost contradictory tendencies, one emphasizing Sparta's blending into the homogenized cultural world of Hellenistic Greece, the other emphasizing the peculiarities of her 'Lykourgan' constitution, are also recognizable in her material culture. In many respects the Lakedaimonians became more like their contemporaries.

3.4.3 Coinage

Thus, the first Spartan coins were struck – at last – by Areus I probably during the Chremonidean War (268/7–263/2 BC). For economic transactions the Spartans had long used coins minted by others, and the innovation now was more to do with propaganda (the coins were stamped with the head of Herakles and the king's superscription) and possibly with a need to pay mercenaries (Cartledge and Spawforth (1989) 35; Grunauer-von Hoerschelmann 1978). The political message conveyed by coin issues persisted through the third and second centuries BC. Certain kings of Sparta (Areus, Cleomenes III, as well as the autocrat Nabis) struck autonomous issues to mark their hostility to the federal ambitions of the Achaian league, and at other times Achaian federal issues were stamped with the caps of the Dioskouroi (Grandjean 2008). Certainly the Spartan mint was also a step in the 'normalization' of Sparta.

3.4.4 Burials

A second tendency in the Hellenistic and early Roman periods is for the construction of ostentatious tombs. Four such were found in the centre of Sparta overlooking a road or open space; they had elaborate façades with carefully drafted masonry and architectural mouldings – their pediments may well have been crowned by stone anthemia. Other such tombs were constructed in white marble with doors carved in *rosso antico*, whilst another monumental grave was found some 1400m south of the acropolis fronting a major artery running through the city (Raftopoulou 1998; Zavvou et al. (2009) 119). Less certain is the suggestion that the very prominent ‘Circular Building’, in the centre of Sparta, was originally fronted by a large rectangular podium and formed part of an ostentatious funerary monument of Hellenistic date. It was later entirely remodelled, perhaps under the emperor Hadrian, to become the location of the statues of Olympian Zeus and Olympian Aphrodite (Waywell and Wilkes (1994) 414–19). Increasingly elaborate funerary monuments were characteristic of Hellenistic Greece, a fashion which seems to have spread from the Macedonia of Philip and Alexander, and a mark of aristocratic display not tolerated in earlier times. Another sign of the times is the introduction of inscribed grave reliefs for Spartans as well as foreigners: thus Sparta Museum 257 carved in the local blue marble shows a bearded man seated and in a pensive attitude with a dog looking at him, while on the architrave is a funerary inscription. The relief has been dated to the third to second centuries BC (Tod and Wace (1906) 159; cf. also *Archaiologikon Deltion* 54 B1 (1999) 164–5).

After a unique early Imperial example, the elaborately carved marble sarcophagi of the second to fourth centuries AD include both imports from Attike and local imitations (Koch 1993; Karapanagiotou 2009). Marble sculpture also decorated the extraordinary mausoleum at Ktiriakia, just east of Sparta (Christou 1963), which held four sarcophagi; note also the Late Roman vaulted mausoleum near Gytheion (Delivorrias (1968) 151–3). Perhaps slightly less elaborate, but still remarkable, is the cemetery of about ten rock-cut tombs with vaulted chambers decorated with frescoes found on the edge of Sparta (Adamantiou 1934).

The growth of the extramural cemeteries to the west and the north also demonstrates the Spartans’ growing conformity to norms found elsewhere (Themom et al. 2009). The more ordinary tile-graves are of a form found widely throughout Greece; gold wreaths are placed in graves (*Archaiologikon Deltion* 52 B1 (1997) 164), a common acknowledgement for public service as mentioned in the inscriptions.

3.4.5 Heritage and the invention of tradition

Pueri Spartiatae non ingemescunt verberum dolore laniati. adolescentium greges Lacedaemone vidimus ipsi incredibili contentione certantis pugnis calcibus unguibus morsu denique, cum exanimarentur prius quam victos se faterentur.

Spartan boys do not cry out from the pain of the lash's weals. I myself have witnessed at Sparta the teams of youths fighting with remorseless intensity using fists, heels, nails and teeth, when they would rather expire than admit defeat. (Cic. Tusc. 5.77)

Cicero observed the whipping at Artemis Orthia and the contest at Platanistas when he visited Sparta in 79–77 BC. The Spartan youths were exemplars of *fortitudo* (the Roman virtue identifiable with Greek *karteria*), which Cicero associated closely with *magnitudo animi*, the admired Stoic quality of *megalopsychia* (Schofield (2009) 204–10). His visit was a century or so after the reformulation of Spartan ‘education’ which saw, amongst many changes, the Orthia ritual transformed to a trial of endurance and, perhaps, the construction of the artificial setting for the Platanistas contest (Kennell (1995) esp. 111–13). Such Stoic ideals were embraced by the Hellenistic aristocracy and gained even wider currency under the Roman Empire. The power of these ideas combined with Sparta’s glorious history to foster archaizing inventions of tradition which also found their expression in material culture. (On the archaizing tendency in Roman Sparta, see [Chapter 15](#) by Lafond, this volume.) The degree to which we can recognize continuity in, or reform of, Spartan institutions (for example a transformation of Spartan education, ‘no longer a *paideia* but an *ephebeia*’, Ducat (2006) xiv) during the Hellenistic and Roman periods is still very controversial (Kennell 1995; Ducat 2006). But Spartan society was transformed in the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

3.4.6 Sanctuaries

In fact there is not much we can point to from the sanctuaries themselves to suggest large-scale building during the Hellenistic period. At Artemis Orthia, a massive stone drain, 1m wide x 2.2m high, probably has more to do with the drainage of the whole city rather than just the sanctuary. Hellenistic pottery continued to be dedicated including a series of bowls inscribed with the name of Chilonis, who may have had royal connections (Dawkins (1929) 372–4). On the basis of tile stamps it has been argued that the temple was refurbished in the second century BC (ibid., 27–5). From the second century onwards, starting with the stele of Xenokles, with its relief showing the temple’s facade, the number of victory inscriptions dedicated at Orthia increased to reach a peak in the first to second centuries AD. In the later first century BC some

formalization of the auditorium, where people sat to view the whipping ceremony, is suggested by a stone seat, which would have stood in the front row, inscribed with the name of Soixiadas (Dawkins (1929) 285–377).

The history of cult at small rural sanctuaries presents no single coherent picture: at the Menelaion the evidence points to a decline towards the end of the Hellenistic period, as just a few isolated finds of Roman date have been recovered; whilst the shrine of Zeus Messapeus at Tzakona shows a revival indicated by lamps of the second to third centuries AD (Catling 1976–7; 1990). The sanctuary at Kastraki produced finds from the archaic to early Roman period, particularly rich in the Hellenistic period, and then sporadic finds including lamps of the same types (de la Genière 2005). On the other hand the small sanctuary at Aigiai seems to have material from every period from the archaic through to the fourth century AD (Bonias 1998).

3.4.7 The Roman city

The city of Sparta continued its transformation in the late first century BC, under the leadership and patronage of the dynast C. Julius Eurykles, rewarded partisan of the founding emperor Augustus. (On Eurykles/Eurycles see also Lafond, [Chapter 15](#), this volume.) The theatre was a magnificent building, similar in size to the great Greek theatres of Epidauros and Megalopolis. The cavea, 114m in diameter and housing some forty-eight rows of seats, was bedded on concrete foundations, supporting a mudbrick core and retained by a revetment of carefully drafted marble. Indeed the traditional Greek materials of stone and marble were used to clothe the whole building. A colonnade of Doric columns lined the walkway at the very top of the theatre, their shafts of Pentelic marble from Attike. The original stage building, which was completely destroyed in the Flavian period, was also Doric, with two orders of columns probably set one on top of the other. A strong case has been made for a *scaena ductilis*, the latest fashion from Rome, which allowed, during performances, scenery to be rolled to and fro into the theatre. A new stage building was paid for by the Emperor Vespasian in 78 AD (perhaps marking the overthrow of the Eurykles dynasty) with a Roman-style stage in the Corinthian order, and built using material from much of the eastern Empire: granite from the Troad, and Pentelic, Laconian and Pergamene marble (Waywell et al. 1998).

A slightly later, but equally lavish monument to Roman patronage was the Roman Stoa built c.AD 130–50: a massive, concrete and brick structure 188m long, for much of its south side it stood two storeys high; it probably had a colonnade to back and to front opening to the north and to the south ([Figure 3.8](#)). The walls and floors were faced with veneers of white and pink marble. The theory that it was a rebuilding of the famous Persian Stoa has not been

proved (Waywell and Wilkes 1994) and an alternative has been identified a little to the northwest (Kourinou 2000, 109–14).

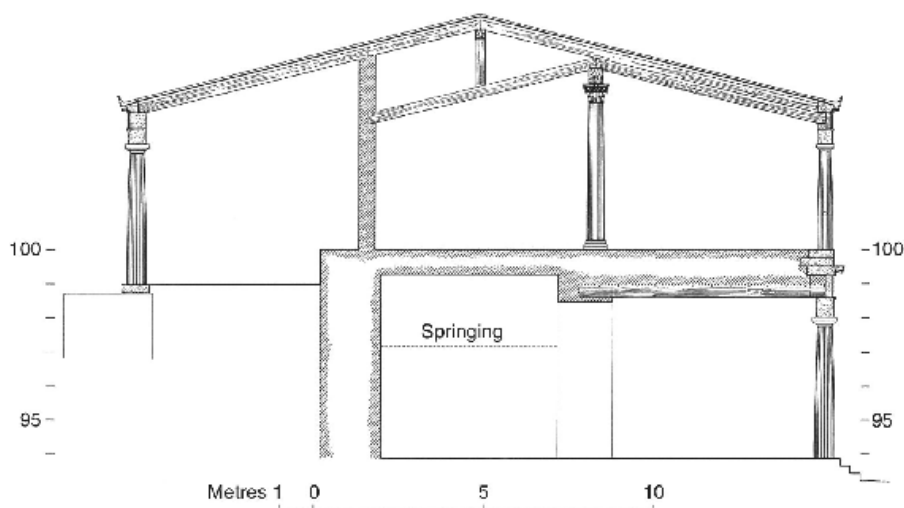


Figure 3.8 Hypothetical reconstruction of the Roman Stoa at Sparta

(after Waywell and Wilkes (1994) 409, fig. 11). *Source:* Author.

The contest by flagellation at the shrine of Artemis Orthia became notorious in the Roman period (Plutarch, like Cicero earlier, describes witnessing it), and in the mid-third century AD a theatre was built to accommodate the visitors who flocked to the spectacle. Such public buildings were not confined to Sparta. Gytheion boasted a small theatre and some of the smaller Laconian towns had baths (Gytheion, Boia, Asopos/Plytra and Teuthrone) and gymnasia (Akriai: Paus. 3.22.5).

As well as public buildings, much care was lavished on private houses in Sparta; they were particularly common in the centre and towards the west of the city, extending beyond the probable line of the Hellenistic walls, marking the affluent sectors of Roman Sparta. They follow the standard design of Roman urban villas of the third to fourth centuries AD. It seems that a rectangular grid road system was extended over much of the city on a NE–SW orientation, probably in the early Imperial period; an extensive urban system of water supply and drainage was also constructed, building on and extending that of the Hellenistic city (Themos 2001–2).

Mosaics form a useful index of the growth and prosperity of Sparta. By 1996, 137 mosaic pavements were known from 98 different sites, and a good number have been discovered since (Panagiotopoulou 1998). There was a developing tradition of such installations from the Hellenistic through the early Roman period, but the third century AD saw a peak in production and some of the most accomplished pavements, with a rich repertoire of representational scenes. They reflect the cultural interests of the wealthy –

theatre masks and Dionysos, the Muses, Apollo and Orpheus, poets (Alkman and Tyrtaios set against Anakreon and Sappho), love and vanity (Aphrodite, erotes, Zeus and Ganymede, Zeus and Europa), scenes from mythology and epic, marine motifs and the hunt. They decorated private houses, notably the triclinia, corridors, atria and open areas, but they are also found in public buildings such as baths.

3.5 Concluding Remarks

This chapter is certainly not *the* and is hardly *an* archaeology of the region: there are many different possible approaches to the subject, big gaps in our evidence and much ambiguity in interpreting the finds. One current in this narrative is the tension between, on the one hand, the Spartans' ideological claims to be *different* and conservative, and, on the other, the waves of cultural influences which made them ever more indistinguishable from their neighbours. Rather as historians have found it difficult to penetrate the later 'Spartan mirage' which, in the literary sources, masks the classical reality, so archaeologists have a problem in excavating away the overlying levels of modern, medieval and Roman Sparta in order to reveal the city's earlier remains. Respecting the later archaeological levels presents a severe constraint on accessing the earlier. However, thanks not least to the remarkable efforts of the Greek Archaeological Service, more and more of the earlier history of Sparta and especially of Laconia has in recent years come to light. Much still remains to do, and we can be sure that future finds, as well as fresh insights, will mean rewriting the archaeology of this, one of Greece's greatest city-states.

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NOTE

- 1 Because of the constraints of space, references have been kept to a minimum, and generally to recent discussions from which readers can then trace back a fuller bibliography.

CHAPTER 4

Lykourgos the Spartan “Lawgiver”: *Ancient Beliefs and Modern Scholarship*

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In the mid-twentieth century, in an essay that defined with unusual clarity the limits to our knowledge of ancient Sparta, C.G. Starr complained that “virtually every twelve months a new article solidly and irrefutably assigns Lykourgos to a different date than that proved in last year's study” (Starr (1965) 26). Starr alluded ironically to the words with which Plutarch opens his *Life* of Lykourgos:

Generally speaking it is impossible to make any undisputed statement about Lykourgos the lawgiver, since conflicting accounts have been given of his ancestry, his travels, his death, and above all of his activity with respect to his laws and government; but there is least agreement about the period in which the man lived.

(trans. R.J.A. Talbert)

Plutarch goes on to list a long series of conflicting opinions about the date of Lykourgos, and the entire *Life* is an impressive collection of ancient opinions on Lykourgos' legislation. Interest in the centrality of Sparta in ancient culture guaranteed for Lykourgos (widely considered an exemplary politician) a prominent place in the cultural heritage of the Greeks and Romans. The existence of Lykourgos was not doubted. His personal life and affairs were outlined, his political views and his moral grandeur were explained. Ancient writers also attempted to determine his date and to reconstruct his reforms, while setting out a description of the Spartan institutions,

These ancient studies contrast with current scholarship on Sparta. The focus has (rightly) shifted from the person of Lykourgos to the tradition about Lykourgos. In a sense, current research has moved closer to the studies made at the end of the 1800s and the beginning of the 1900s, when scholars such as E. Meyer (1892a) and J. Beloch ((1912–1927) 253–6) sought to define the character of the tradition of the legendary Lykourgos and separate it from the history of ancient Sparta. Later critics have variously attempted to re-establish a relationship between the ancient evidence on Lykourgos and Sparta's history. They were encouraged to do so also by archaeological finds in the early years of the twentieth century at the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia, which

seemed to support the idea of a great archaic reform (Dawkins et al. (1929), Förtsch (2001)). Some have tried to trace the nebulous memory of this reform in the tales of the classical era without conceding the historicity of Lykourgos.¹ Others – against whom Starr protested – have embarked on the arduous road to recovering Lykourgos, confident in the broad tradition about him.² Today, even the first of these two solutions has not been widely accepted. Skepticism prevails, from a view that collective memory results in a constant reformulation of oral traditions. The identification of common motifs in the tales of legislators (motifs present in the stories of Lykourgos, Solon, Charondas, and Zaleukos) has greatly contributed to the understanding of these traditions in recent decades.³ As for the person of Lykourgos, most would subscribe to the stark judgement of Antony Andrewes: “if there was a real Lykourgos, we know nothing of him” (Andrewes (1956) 77). Critics carefully separate individual testimonies from the legend of Lykourgos. This tactic primarily concerns the so-called Great *Rhētra*,⁴ the famous document quoted by Plutarch as an oracle given to Lykourgos (*Lyk.* 6): this is considered objective evidence of a remote moment freed from the legend, which formed afterwards. In fact, a large part of recent research attempts to define the historical significance of narratives on Lykourgos. Recent scholarship has aimed to determine the content of the tradition, to examine its complex and layered nature and to clarify the different periods in which the elements of that tradition were formed. The myth of Lykourgos was originally part of local Spartan culture, but extant today are narratives of non-Spartan authors, often heavily influenced by their predecessors, who followed their individual political, cultural and philosophical agendas.⁵ Critics who study Lykourgos explore the history of ideas and ancient political reflections, and they contribute to an understanding of the history of Sparta, though often moving within the boundaries of the “Spartan mirage.”⁶

Our sources on Lykourgos also reflect post-archaic historical realities. The tradition is malleable and characterized by the continuous addition of new elements. The very decline of Sparta stimulated an idealization of Lykourgos in non-Spartan sources. Locally, the story of Lykourgos had an obvious foundational character. The tradition about the lawgiver was in part shaped by contemporary situation and values, but it was also highly active in the present. The existence of an ancient and venerable legislator – behind whom, as in the case of other *nomothetai*, was divine sanction – secured for the city's laws and customs (*nomoi*) a timeless nature, greater legitimacy, and made them more solid and binding.⁷ The legend of Lykourgos was constantly renewed, a continuing “invention of tradition” (Flower (2002), cf. Hodkinson (1997) 84–7). In general, the notion that the uniqueness and excellence of Sparta were due to the laws of Lykourgos was an important factor in the city's history even in times of crisis and change (Hölkeskamp (2010) 327–30). The kings of the third century set out to restore the rigor of Lykourgos' *nomoi* (even negatively, when, for instance, Kleomenes III justified the abolition of the

Ephorate as non-Lykourgan), while their opponents appealed to those same laws.⁸ After Sparta's entry into the Achaean League, and the abolition of these *nomoi* in 189/8BC, the request to restore the laws of Lykourgos was an important diplomatic weapon in the hands of Sparta. Apparently, the Spartans had them reactivated well before their separation from the Achaean League (146), in 184/3 or 179/8.⁹ Sparta under the Roman empire was committed to a contrived but no less real work of recovering its pristine, Lykourgan nature (see Lafond, [Chapter 15](#), this work). Lykourgos was an inspirer of customs, and the founder of rituals that attracted spectators from all over the Graeco-Roman world. He was endowed with statues, a place of worship, and even an identity as eponymous magistrate.¹⁰ The weight of each of these periods in shaping the tradition of Lykourgos and his laws is variously assessed in current scholarship: we may think in particular of the recent debates on Spartan education and on land tenure.¹¹

4.1 From the “Great” *Rhētra* to Herodotos

Stories about lawgivers in many ways resemble foundation stories of Greek cities. The founder himself is rarely a legislator; the legislator is more often the protagonist of a “second foundation”, driving a community from disorder to order. While foundation stories were the charters for the unity of the civic body, stories about legislation validated the rules which regulated the lives of the citizens. Lykourgos represents a particularly clear case of the analogy between lawgiver and founder in the memory of Greek political communities. While the *oikistai* (founders) of the Greek cities, following the directions of Apollo, were the protagonists of the events that allowed the city to have its place in the world designed by the gods and fate, Lykourgos, with divine approval, placed Sparta at the head of Greece: the power of Sparta was in fact considered a product of his laws. While other lawgivers did not usually receive hero cults in their cities, Lykourgos was honored by the Spartans as a hero, or rather as a god.¹² It is well known that cult places of *oikistai* were a central depository of memory and identity for the *poleis*: for these founders, hero cult was the rule, whereas divine honors are rare.¹³

Cults of gods and cults of heroes were different in form, but they were also an expression of the superiority of the gods over demigods and great human benefactors. By reserving divine honors for the founder, cities recognized his elevated position in the hierarchy of civic heroes. Influential scholars of classical antiquity at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries thought that Lykourgos was originally a god, worshiped as a legislator. Instead, we believe today, he was a legislator (probably mythical) who was revered as a god.¹⁴ The preexistence of a hero named Lykourgos, to whom legislation was attached subsequently, is also possible: but this heroic

figure is no less elusive than an alternative, human one.

Herodotos' account of Lykourgos represents the first extended narrative about him that has come to us (1.65–66.1). Writing in the second half of the fifth century, Herodotos recounts that in the middle of the sixth century King Croesus of Lydia was invited by oracles to ally with the most powerful among the Greeks. He found that these were the Spartans and the Athenians but that the latter were in poor condition (cf. 1.65.1; 68.6; 69.2; cf. 56.2 and 59.1). Conversely, Sparta was very powerful in the middle of the sixth century. Our historian dwells at length on the wars with Tegea, which ended favorably for Sparta due to the transfer of the remains of the legendary Orestes to the city. Then, going further back in time, Herodotos tells the story of Lykourgos. He explains how Lykourgos led the *polis* from a situation of extreme disorder (*kakonomōtatoi*) to a condition of order (*eunomia*; *eunomiē* in Herodotos' Ionic dialect) that fostered its progressive growth.

To elaborate his account of Spartan *eunomia*, Herodotos tells of Lykourgos' visit to Delphi. There, the Pythia addresses Lykourgos without his prompting her – in the common way for an *oikistēs* – with a question. This was a sign of great divine honor and it suggests the predestined nature of the events that follow (Parke (1962), Harrison (2000) 70, 125). Some claim, Herodotos says, that the Pythia also gave instructions to Lykourgos to establish the Spartan system existing in Herodotos' own day (τὸ ν νῦν κατεστεῶτα κοῖσμον). Herodotos counters this view. He argues that, according to the Spartans, Lykourgos – who was not merely a “man of distinction among the Spartans,” but also the uncle and regent of the young king Leobotes – derived his system from Crete. While tutoring Leobotes Lykourgos, according to Herodotos, changed “all the laws;” then he established the military organization of the Spartans – among the structures of the army the *syssitia* are mentioned – and also the *gerousia* and the *ephorate*. According to this version, Lykourgos made his reforms on an existing Sparta, which however was already led by two *basileis*.

The first explicit mention of Lykourgos is in Simonides (fr. 628 Page). The identity of this “Simonides” is discussed: some scholars identify him with the famous poet who lived in the sixth and fifth centuries (Piccirilli (1978), Kōiv (2005) 239 and n. 36), others with an obscure homonymous relative of the same poet, a genealogist who must have lived in the second half of the fifth century (Meyer (1892a) 276–7, Tigerstedt (1965–1978) I 376 n. 547, Paradiso (1999), Paradiso (2008)). The origin of this uncertainty is the two passages which mention Simonides in conjunction with Lykourgos. Plutarch (*Lyk.* 1.8) cites “the poet” as a source of Lykourgos' genealogy: “The poet Simonides maintains that Lykourgos' father was not Eunomos [as most claimed, M.N.], but that both Lykourgos and Eunomos were the sons of Prytanis” (trans. R.J.A. Talbert). An ancient commentator on Plato (*Rep.* 10.599d) attributes to “Simonides” information that one would only expect to find in a genealogist.

Therefore *prima facie* this second passage could lead us to think that Simonides was indeed the genealogist. Nevertheless, this information includes chronographic details improbable in a fifth-century author, as the younger Simonides was. In short, it is likely that the poet Simonides had something to say about Lykourgos, his father and his brother, and that some chronographic details were added to his information, when it was used in the erudite debate on the genealogy of Lykourgos. In fact, as we shall see, this information by the poet Simonides is not purely genealogical.

By the time of Herodotos, the figure of Lykourgos had long been present in Sparta, and must have been known also to other Greeks.¹⁵ Herodotos mentions a sanctuary of Lykourgos founded, according to him, at his death. The last notion makes a recent foundation highly unlikely. The historian believes that he can attribute to non-Spartans opinions on the origins of the laws of Sparta and the manner in which Lykourgos introduced these laws into the city. There were also different ideas about Lykourgos: Herodotos seems to know that the Spartans wanted him to be from the Agiad family, but he proposes this notion to clarify a more vague one, that Lykourgos was only a common citizen. The tradition present in Simonides is different again (fr. 628 Page): by making Lykourgos a member of the Eurypontid family, Simonides anticipated the most popular version of the fourth century onwards; but in considering him brother of king Eunomos, he differed because in that version Eunomos was the father of Lykourgos. It is evident that the two royal houses vied for the honor of having given birth to the famous lawgiver. The Eurypontid tradition is often thought to be more recent than the Agiad one. Both on the contrary are pre-Herodotean constructs. The relative antiquity of Lykourgos' insertion among the Eurypontids is suggested by the presence of Eunomos in the Herodotean genealogy of the family (Hdt. 8.131.2): this significantly-named – and obviously just as fictitious as Prytanis – character is “naturally” linked to Lykourgos, founder of *eunomia*, and therefore his presence in the Eurypontid genealogy presupposes a history of Lykourgos similar to that known to Simonides.¹⁶ It is indeed true that Thucydides, in a passage of the Archaeology significantly echoing Herodotos, does not mention Lykourgos (1.18.1). The silence is perhaps due to brevity: Thucydides focuses on the historical role of *eunomia* and on the institutional stability of Sparta at the end of a very complex excursus. It is certainly far-fetched to take Thucydides' silence as evidence that he knew alternative traditions on the origin of Spartan *eunomia*. The implicit allusion to the Cretan origin of Spartan laws in Perikles' Funeral Speech (Thuc. 2.37.1) suggests that Thucydides – and perhaps many Athenians – knew the various traditions of Lykourgos.¹⁷ Furthermore, Thucydides' dating of the beginning of *eunomia* in Sparta – a little more than four hundred years from the end of the Peloponnesian war (1.18.1), i.e. some time before or 804 or 821 – likely uses the genealogy of Lykourgos and the kings of Sparta. Specifically, this dating may have presented the legislation as completed by Lykourgos in the

reign of the Eurypontid Charilaos, as required by the later narrative that Ephoros' authority made canonical.¹⁸ In any event, Thucydides (much like Herodotos) dates the stabilization of *eunomia* in Sparta long after the foundation of the *polis* by the Heraklids. Therefore Thucydides does not endorse the only extant dissenting account, that of Hellanikos, who traced the laws of Sparta to Eurysthenes and Prokles (*FGrH* 4 F 116),¹⁹ to be later criticized by Ephoros (*FGrH* 70 F 118) for not mentioning Lykourgos. We should not see great significance in Pindar's silence about Lykourgos, since the poet had no reason to mention him. In 470 BCE, to connect Etna (the city founded by Hieron in Sicily) with Sparta, Pindar evoked in reference to Sparta the king of the Dorians, Aigimios, and his laws (much in the same way as he does for Aigina: *Isthm.* 9.1–6). A link between the two cities could not be established through the laws of Lykourgos, but only through the Dorian legacy (*Pyth.* 1. 60–5).²⁰

It is difficult to identify the period at which the “legend of Lykourgos” was born, preceding Simonides and Herodotos. The Disk of Iphitos – an inscription containing a proclamation of the Olympic Truce and bearing the name of (among others) Iphitos, the founder of the Games according to the Elean tradition, along with the name of Lykourgos – is probably a false document created in the fourth century (see later). Instead, we must carefully consider the “Great” *Rhētra*. Plutarch cites and comments on the text (*Lyk.* 6), and regards it as an oracle that Lykourgos received at Delphi:

Having founded a cult of Zeus Syllanios and Athena Syllania, having kept the divisions of [or: “divided”] the people into tribes and having divided it into *ōbai*, having appointed a council of thirty members, including the founders (*archagetai*), celebrate regularly the Apellai between Babyka and Knakion. Bring in and set aside (proposals) as follows: to the people must go [and here there is a corrupted word] and the final decision, (...): but if the people ask for something crooked (or “speak crookedly”) the elders and the founders are to be setters aside.

(Author's trans.)

Plutarch draws his text and commentary from the Aristotelian *Constitution of the Lakedaimonians* (the opinion of “Aristotle” on the *Rhētra* is in fact cited in *Lyk.* 6.4; cf. Tigerstedt (1965–1978) I, 54, 282; Manfredini–Piccirilli (1980) 234). Plutarch and “Aristotle” declare the final provision (“but if the people ... setters aside”: the so-called *rider*) a surreptitious addition to the body of the *Rhētra*, but most critics rightly consider it an integral part of the original text (Nafissi (2010) 102–4). The *Rhētra* of course does not name Lykourgos: usually it is considered a historical document attached to the legendary lawgiver following the growth of the tradition about him. As I have suggested elsewhere, the *Rhētra* is not a historical, duly-passed law, but a text that reproduces an imaginary ancient oracle granted to Lykourgos and

transformed into law, or an imaginary law submitted beforehand by Lykourgos to the oracle for approval.²¹ It is therefore a part of the legend of Lykourgos, and testifies to an older form, different from that known to Herodotos. The text calls the *basileis* “archagetai”, i.e. *founders*: we may be tempted to infer that the *Rhētra* was putatively promulgated at the time of the first kings of Sparta, the founders of the city and the dyarchy, Prokles and Eurysthenes. This tradition is still alive in the Sparta of the fourth century: in the *Constitution of the Lakedaimonians* (10.8) Xenophon refers to a tradition that Lykourgos lived at the time of the Heraklids, at the beginning of Dorian Sparta.²² The general content of the *Rhētra* betrays its fictitious and retrospective character. It involves a wide-ranging intervention, while genuine archaic laws always contain very specific measures. The *Rhētra* provides for the foundation of cults, the preservation of the Dorian *phylai*, for the creation of the villages, for the organization of the *gerousia* as inclusive of the *archagetai*, and it configures relations between the *gerousia*, the *basileis* (as Heraklids and founders they were endowed with an authority that precedes the intervention of Lykourgos) and the assembly of the people. Thus, I believe, the *Rhētra* “does not mark the beginning of the Spartan constitution, but the beginning of the legend of the Spartan constitution” (Nafissi (2010), 104–10, quotation from p. 113). As noted above, the date of the *Rhētra* is widely debated, with candidates ranging mostly between the eighth and sixth centuries BC. Tyrtaios’ silence about Lykourgos, and the relationship (if only generic and indirect) between the content of the *Rhētra* and the poet’s statements about the institutions and political culture of Sparta, suggest a date not much later than Tyrtaios, therefore in the late seventh or early sixth century.²³

The legend of Lykourgos was probably a result of the military success of Sparta. It was the charter myth of their supposed political roots. Tyrtaios conceived military success as a consequence of obedience to the Heraklid kings, and he mentioned the Delphic oracles to support his view (T 7 G.-P. fr. 1^a, 1^b, 2–4 G.-P. = fr. 1, 2, 4, 5 W.). Apparently, the *Rhētra* also aimed to legitimize the probouleutic power of the *gerousia*, its ability to limit rash decisions by the assembly: the legend of Lykourgos probably developed after a period of deep political turmoil to strengthen the authority of the *basileis* and *gerontes* (Tyrt. T 7 G.-P. = fr. 1 W., cf. Nafissi (2010) 112). The subject of the *Rhētra* is the political institutions of Sparta. The very existence of the *Rhētra* also suggests that the Spartan community was so self-conscious about its *political* rules and organization, that it produced a largely fictionalized charter laying the foundation for both. The further development of this tradition which we know from Herodotos shows a wider awareness of the excellence and uniqueness of *all the local laws and customs*, and their importance for Sparta’s success.

It is perhaps legitimate to consider the *Rhētra* a succinct summary of what

was said of Lykourgos, say, in the early sixth century. At this time the Spartans did not attribute to Lykourgos a complete overhaul of the customs of the community. Lykourgos is the protagonist of a primeval organization of the political life of Sparta, but not – as in Herodotos – the reformer who entirely changed its way of life, promoting its excellence in war and peace. Moreover, the *Rhētra* does not mention the ephors. Some scholars speculate that when the *Rhētra* was composed the ephors were unimportant, but it seems more likely that the ephorate was created in the decades immediately following the *Rhētra* (Nafissi (2009) 130–1). From this perspective, the tradition of Lykourgos embodied in the *Rhētra* is perfectly compatible with Pindar’s insistence on the common origin of the Doric *nomoi* of Sparta. Conversely, Herodotos (and apparently the Spartan tradition of the classical era) postulates a Lykourgos who “changed all the customs and laws and guarded against their transgression” (1.65.5, trans. Godley). Such a reconstruction of the history of Sparta assumes a radical change of rules and city life (the shift from *kakonomia* to *eunomia*) and the creation of the ephors who, instituted by Lykourgos, would succeed him in monitoring compliance with laws. The reformulation of the legend reflects profound political and cultural transformations: in this version the *ephors* are the guardians of public *mores*. These are now perceived as uniquely Spartan rather than as common Dorian traditions, and as the source of Sparta’s success.

Outside Sparta, historians during the classical period theorized that the well-ordered life of that city was the basis for the hegemony of Sparta over the Peloponnese and Greece. Later, the same relationship is posited in negative terms. Even Xenophon, in the period preceding the crisis and collapse of Spartan hegemony, perhaps in the climate that led to the development of the second Athenian league (c.377 BC), attributed the crisis of consensus within Sparta to the behavior of some Spartans who had become unable to obey the laws of Lykourgos (*Lak. Pol.* 14). Historians who wrote after the great watershed of Spartan history, the battle of Leuktra, and with a longer hindsight, consider the glorious hegemony of Sparta to be at an end. In direct and even moralistic terms they identify the abandonment of Lykourgos’ laws as the cause of the decline of Sparta.²⁴

4.2 Lykourgos and the Delphic Oracle

As we have seen, in the fifth century the tradition about Lykourgos was far from uniform. Unsurprisingly, given the way they were formed and disseminated orally, contradictory tales about Lykourgos were told: written sources were heavily influenced by diverse accounts, and there was no “official” tradition. The composition of written treatises set in motion a much broader opportunity for comparison, discussion and rearrangement of “data.”

New questions, unheard of in fifth-century Sparta, arose.²⁵ Very important in this regard is the so-called pamphlet of king Pausanias, which made available “documents” that later historians and antiquarians could not disregard.

Grandson of his namesake, the victor of Plataia, Pausanias succeeded his father Pleistoanax as king of Sparta in 408/7 BC, and in 403 he was involved in clashes in Athens that led to the end of the rule of the Thirty and the restoration of democracy (Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.29–39; Lys. 18.10–12; Arist. *AP* 38.4). He was thus opposed to the designs of the Spartan general Lysandros, the dominant figure in Spartan policy of those years. Pausanias was tried but acquitted (Paus. 3.5.1–2). In 395 he was involved in the Spartan defeat at Haliartos in which Lysandros died. For this he was condemned to death, but he escaped execution at Sparta by fleeing to Tegea. There, he wrote his pamphlet and died sometime after 380 (Xen. *Hell.* 3.5.5–7, 17–25; Diod. 14.89.1; Plut. *Lys.* 28–30.1; Paus. 3.5.3–6; Tod, *GHI* 120).

This work, whose content and purpose have been much debated,²⁶ is known only from the testimony of Ephoros in Strabo. Ephoros defined king Pausanias’ text as an attack on the laws of Lykourgos, and not, as some assume, as a writing “on the laws of Lykourgos.”²⁷ From Strabo’s testimony we know that the pamphlet contained the oracles given by the Pythia to Lykourgos (Pausanias *FGrH* 582 T 3 = Ephor. *FGrH* 70 F 118, *ap.* Strab. 8.5.5). A well-founded belief is that a series of oracles found in ancient sources (especially in the Byzantine *excerpta* from Diodorus Siculus’ Book Seven) stem from Pausanias by way of Ephoros. The *Rhētra* was probably also among the oracles published by Pausanias (Tober (2010) 418 n. 41).²⁸ In Sparta Delphic oracles were preserved by the *basileis* and were known to magistrates named Pythians, who were appointed by the king and assigned the task of consulting Delphi (Hdt. 6.57.2). It is possible that inauthentic oracles could be recorded in the royal archives, and it is likely that some oracles did not originally refer to Lykourgos. Certainly they were considered old and trustworthy by those who preserved and published them.²⁹

By the mid-fourth century BC a new tradition surfaces on the origin of the ephorate. In this tradition the ephorate is no longer credited to Lykourgos, as in Herodotos (1.65.5) and Xenophon (*Lak. Pol.* 8.3–5), but it is the product of the initiative of king Theopompos. Plato alludes to this version in his *Laws*, when he calls the anonymous creator of the Ephorate the “third savior”, after the god and Lykourgos (3.692a). Aristotle, so far as we know, was the first to mention Theopompos: in the *Politics* he cites a saying of that king, who supposedly boasted of having given the monarchy a “measure” making it more durable (5.1313a25–33). This tradition about Theopompos became very influential: it is shared by the author of the Aristotelian *Politeia Lakedaimoniōn* (Arist. fr. 534 Rose = Heraclid. Lemb. *Exc. Pol.* 372, 9 Dilts) who disagrees with “some people” who “ascribe to Lykourgos the entire Spartan system of laws.”

The origin of this tradition about Theopompos is unclear; it is far from certain that it was related to the opinions expressed by Pausanias in his pamphlet, as is usually assumed. Certainly king Pausanias did not invent the story to discredit the ephorate.³⁰ Theopompos' constitutional role was not the hostile fabrication of a furious reject. Indeed, Theopompos' role in creating the ephors was officially credited in Sparta, as indicated by the location of his tomb in front of the sanctuary of Lykourgos (Paus. 3.16.6). Apparently, Theopompos was considered benefactor of the community and prudent reformer of institutions: Plato and Aristotle praised Theopompos for having created an instrument of preservation for the city and the monarchy. Finally, no one in Sparta would ever have resorted to Theopompos to delegitimize one of the city's institutions. Theopompos was famous because – as Tyrtaios reports (fr. 2 G.-P = 5, 1-2 W.) – he was the protagonist of the first conquest of Messenia: this was a particularly significant accomplishment, especially centuries later in the years that followed the rebirth of Messene (369). Only in the third century BC did the king Kleomenes III (Plut. *Kleom.* 10), who also wanted to get rid of the ephorate, rework this tradition to suit his plans. He claimed that the kings first appointed as ephors some of their friends, to dispense justice while they themselves were away on lengthy campaigns during the Messenian wars (an obvious reference to Theopompos). In later times – according to Kleomenes – the power of the ephors grew, to finally become a danger for the *polis*.

Possibly, the tradition about Theopompos and the ephorate was merely constructed from the silence about the ephorate in the oracles published by the king Pausanias. The development of the tradition well illustrates the fact that the past is not a blank page on which one can write myths or “invent traditions” at will. The oracles given to Lykourgos and published by Pausanias did not mention the ephorate. The city took account of these “data” and credited the creation of ephors to the most revered king of the far past, Theopompos. Possibly, the choice was made easier by other knowledge. Tyrtaios claimed that a prophecy on public debate had been brought to Sparta by Theopompos and Polydoros (Tyr. fr. 1^b G.-P. = 4, 1-6 West.). Theopompos (and Polydoros) were therefore known to have carried out political reforms backed by Delphi.³¹ In turn, the tradition about Theopompos was a received truth for king Kleomenes. He “invented” the growth of the ephorate and its becoming a dangerous institution, in order to justify its abolition.

The tradition about the relationship between Lykourgos and Delphi is revealing. As we have seen, Herodotos seems to contrast an anonymous tradition, accepted by some (τινές), according to which Lykourgos received his laws at Delphi, with another account – Spartan, according to him – which had the laws come from Crete.³² This latter version is surprising, in that it has the Spartans seem to reject the idea that their laws came from Delphi,³³ and

thereby renounce the most potent divine sanction that their political and social norms could have had. The theme of divine inspiration is frequent in traditions about lawgivers (Szegedy-Maszak (1978) 204–5, Hölkeskamp (1999) 47–8), and Spartan tradition elsewhere invokes it consistently. The *Rhētra* seems to have presumed a relationship with Delphi because it was considered an oracle in prose, and Tyrtaios reports an oracle of Apollo – clearly of normative aim – brought back to the city by kings Theopompos and Polydoros (Tyrt. fr. 1^b G.-P., 4, 1–6 West in Plut. *Lyk.* 6.10). Moreover, Herodotos himself knew a consultation of the Pythia in relation to the creation of the dyarchy (6.52.4–5), and after Herodotos no one denies some form of Apolline sanction of the laws. Overall, between the fifth and the beginning of the fourth century, Spartan public opinion consistently shows “a profound faith in divination” (Powell (2010), 129).³⁴

In the fourth century, and later, some believe in the divine inspiration of the Spartan laws, just as Herodotos’ “certain people” (τινέες) had before. Probably king Pausanias too thought that Lykourgos must have followed the word of god, the source of his laws. Certainly some of the oracles seemed to testify that the Pythia had *dictated* the *nomoi* to Lykourgos.³⁵ Plato opens his *Laws* by remarking that Minos and Lykourgos received their laws from a god, the former from Zeus and the latter from Apollo (1.624a, 1.632d, cf. Poseidon. *FGrH* 87 F 70.38). For others, however, the god of Delphi simply *approved* the laws first composed by Lykourgos. Xenophon, the generally pro-Spartan author of *Lakedaimoniōn Politeia*, emphasizes Sparta’s uniqueness and argues that it was the result of Lykourgos’ invention, not the result of imitation (1.2). Yet even he does not reject the consultation of the oracle. For him, Apollo simply corroborated the righteousness of Lykourgos’ laws (8.5):

Among the many other contrivances of Lykourgos to make the citizens want to obey the laws, the following seems to me to be one of the best. He did not present his laws to the masses until he, along with the foremost citizens, went to Delphi and consulted the god and asked if things would be better and finer for Sparta if she obeyed the laws he had put in place. When the answer was given that things would be considerably better, he then presented the laws to them ...

(Trans. Jackson)

A fuller reconstruction is proposed in the mid-fourth century by Ephoros. According to him, Lykourgos traveled to Crete after a short period of regency at Sparta. In Crete he learned the principles to be embodied in his *nomoi* and, adopting the suggestion of a poet and expert on the law, Thales (or Thaletas), he imitated the practice of king Minos. Following the example of Rhadamanthys, Minos went into the cave of Zeus, and thereafter presented the laws as if they had been conceived by God, so that they would be better accepted (*FGrH* 70 F 149.19, cf. 147). Subsequent authors probably followed

Ephoros' account, even when they offered concise reports, focusing on the Cretan origin or divine dispensation of the laws.³⁶

It is commonly said that Ephoros consolidated into a whole what Herodotos had presented as divergent versions. Even if this claim has the authority of E. Meyer ((1892a) 269) and F. Jacoby (*FGrHist* II, C *Kommentar*, 85), it may be factually incorrect.³⁷ It is likely (as already argued by Busolt (1920) 42, Nilsson (1961–1967) I 642 and now Köiv (2005) 248 n. 96), that Herodotos limits himself to pointing out the essential difference between the two versions: he denies that the Pythia *gave* the laws to Lykourgos, but not that she *approved* them. In fact, it is hard to believe that those in Sparta who stressed the contribution of Crete, and therefore the “human” origin of the laws, denied the role of Delphi as a guarantor of their excellence. Besides, the historian recounts the visit to Delphi as a step towards *eunomia*. No one disputes Apollo's involvement in Lykourgos' lawgiving, but just the ultimate origin of his laws.³⁸ Herodotos momentarily bifurcates his narrative on this topic, but he then resumes with the proud tone of one who can provide detail (thanks to information attributed to the Spartan tradition) about the person of Lykourgos and his reform. It is therefore reasonable to suppose that even the “entirely Delphic” tradition on the origin of the laws was born in Sparta.³⁹

Ephoros did not have to combine the two versions of Herodotos, but to reconcile more effectively the notion of the Cretan origin of the laws – in which he firmly believed (*FGrH* 70 F 149) – with the oracles published by Pausanias: from these it was clear that the Pythia did not limit herself to confirming Lykourgos' proposed legislation. In other words, Ephoros was faced with a problem related to the two kinds of oracles commonly recorded by the classical tradition: responses in a simple yes/no form (responding to a question like, in our case, that of Lykourgos in Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 8.5: “he ... asked [the god] if things would be better and finer for Sparta if it obeyed the Laws he had put in place” trans. Jackson), and more elaborate normative oracles in verse or prose, as in the case of the *Rhētra*, which pose to modern critics the question of their composition and historicity (Fontenrose (1978) 212–24, Bowden (2005) 22–24, 33–9). The former style of response would have suggested that Apollo had sanctioned the laws elaborated by Lykourgos, while the latter – largely predominant in the tradition about Lykourgos – showed apparently the god dictating them. Ephoros responds with the story of Rhadamanthys, Minos and Lykourgos, who present to the people their own laws “as if” they were inspired by god: Lykourgos went to Delphi and “brought ordinances (προστάγματα) back from there”: F 149.19. This is the interpretative line which through the Aristotelian *Lakedaimoniōn Politeia* comes down to Plutarch in relation to the “Great” *Rhētra*. In Plutarch's version, the oracle provides precise measures based on what has been already engineered by Lykourgos, for example regarding the number of *gerontes* (*Lyk.* 5.12–6.1), and amendments to the *Rhētra* (6.9: “these kings too – *scil.* as well

as Lykourgos – persuaded the city that the god had ordered this supplement – as Tyrtaios seems to be recalling in the following lines,” trans. R.J.A. Talbert, modified).

4.3 Genealogy and Chronology: Lykourgos the Regent

As we saw earlier, Plutarch was dismayed by the problem of the chronology of Lykourgos. He had very good reason to be dismayed, to judge by the range of (surviving) ancient opinions on the topic – most of which are now known to us only thanks to Plutarch himself. According to Herodotos (1.65.4), Lykourgos was the regent of Leobotes, who lived three generations after Eurysthenes, the founder of the Agiad dynasty (thus Lykourgos was the eighth descendant of Herakles, counting inclusively).⁴⁰ In the *Constitution of the Lakedaimonians* (10.8) Xenophon accepts, however, the tradition that Lykourgos lived at the time of the Heraklids. As Plutarch says (who also records this opinion) this would be at the time of Eurysthenes and Prokles, the first kings of Sparta. It is possible that this tradition is very old, and already expressed in the “Great” *Rhētra*. The coupling usually accepted by ancient authors, however, is that supported by Simonides and later by Ephoros (*FGrH* 70 F 118, 149.19, 173): Lykourgos was the guardian of the Eurypontid Charilaos. On this reckoning Lykourgos was the sixth descendant of Prokles and the eleventh from Herakles (using inclusive calculation). Hellenistic chronographers (Eratosthenes *FGrH* 241 F 2, Apollodorus of Athens *FGrH* 244 F 64) translated this latter genealogy into a numerical chronology; Lykourgos would propose his laws 118 years after the first year of the reign of Prokles, in “our” 885/4 BC. The chronographers, however, had to face another complication arising from the documents. According to the Aristotelian *Lakedaimoniōn Politeia* (fr. 533 Rose), Lykourgos participated in the establishment of the Olympic Games: he would have therefore lived around 776/5 BC. The Disk of Iphitos could be taken as documentary support for this chronology.

The Disk of Iphitos is a *forged* document produced around 360 BC, in the manner of others created in this period. It was fabricated in the context of reconciliation between Sparta and the Eleans and between the Eleans and the Pisatans in the aftermath of the Anolympiad of 364 BC, which the Pisatans organized with the support of the Arcadians. On it was inscribed the formula for the proclamation of an Olympic Truce. As we have seen, the Disk mentioned, among others, the names of Iphitos – the founder of the games according to the Elean tradition – and Lykourgos.⁴¹ The chronology of Lykourgos thus became extremely problematic but it also became an intersection vital to the construction of Greek chronography: the point of

contact between the lists of the kings of Sparta and the start of the Olympics (Mosshammer (1979) 173–92, Möller (2005)). At the end of the classical period Timaios (*FGrH* 566 F 127), who followed the more common chronology of Lykourgos, determined by his genealogy and also by the traditions of his meeting with Homer (Ephor. *FGrH* 70 F 149.19), assumed that the Lykourgos connected with the establishment of the Games was just a namesake of the lawgiver. Eratosthenes in the third century resolved the same difficulty by invoking earlier, informal Olympics held before those properly registered which began in 776/5; he thus backdated the Disk of Iphitos (Mosshammer (1979) 179–81; Möller (2005)).

Given these many uncertainties, it is remarkable that Lykourgos is almost always mentioned as a guardian of a king (Hdt. 1.65.4, Ephor. *FGrH* 70 F 149.19, Arist. *Pol.* 2.1271b 25, Plut. *Lyk.* 3). This version possibly innovates on the tradition that makes Lykourgos only a “man of distinction” (Hdt. 1.65.2: Niese (1907a) 444). Lykourgos, however, is the guardian in Herodotos’ Agiad version, and in the more common, Eurypontid one. Simonides’ remarks on Lykourgos, even in the minimal form presented by Plutarch, who does not mention Lykourgos’ relationship with Charilaos but only the one with his brother Eunomos,⁴² are not extracted from a genealogical list, but they distil a family story about Lykourgos’ regency.

Scholars have not sufficiently considered this aspect of the legend of Lykourgos. It is commonly believed that the regency was a device contrived to insert Lykourgos into the list of kings, despite a specific obstacle: namely, that the royal lists were already canonized, and thus, it is also suggested, obstructed the wish to situate Lykourgos chronologically in the Spartan past.⁴³ However, we should not assume that any such obstruction existed. It is doubtful whether Spartan royal genealogies were already fixed in the fifth century, whereas it is likely that the tradition of Lykourgos (as discussed above) was already current by the sixth century. Moreover, the earlier part of the Eurypontid genealogy was very variable and susceptible to additions (such as that of Soos, who found a place between Prokles and Eurypontes), even in the fourth century (Vannicelli (1993), 43 and n. 50). Further, the Eurypontid genealogy known to Herodotos (8.131.2) took account of the founder of *eunomia* and considered him a man of royal extraction, because it included the name *Eunomos*. In other words, the Eurypontid genealogy known to Herodotos is built by taking into account the existence of a regent named Lykourgos.⁴⁴ The theme of “Lykourgos the regent” is therefore a central and constitutive element of the Spartan tradition of Lykourgos: the story – as some have noted – was designed to embody a selfless, righteous figure imbued with a spirit of service and self-sacrifice.

This becomes clear by looking closely at the story, which is split into two variants: in one Lykourgos legislated during his regency, which he carried to its lawful end (Hdt. 1.65.4–5; Just. 3.2.5–7); in the other he prematurely left

the regency and he offered his laws after a period of voluntary exile, not as regent. The second variant is better known. In this version Lykourgos was forced to flee unjustified suspicions. Specifically, there were rumors that he wanted to get rid of his young charge so as to reign in his place, and he also feared a conspiracy that targeted the boy (Ephor. *FGrH* 70 F 149.19, Plut. *Lyk.* 3). It was also said that the brother of Lykourgos, Polydektes, died leaving his wife pregnant. The widow propositioned Lykourgos, asking him to marry her and become king. This story gives Lykourgos a full taste of royalty (Ephor. *FGrH* 70 F 149.19, Plut. *Lyk.* 3, Just. 3.2.5). Plutarch – who recounts the story in the most detail – adds that she offered to facilitate the procedure by having an abortion. Lykourgos pretended that he would marry her if she carried her pregnancy to term and so he saved the infant (Plut. *Lyk.* 3.3–6, cf. Olymp. *In Gorg.* 44.1). Lykourgos makes totally clear that he will leave the *basileia*, as required by *nomos*, when the boy comes of age. The story implies that the future lawgiver had ample opportunity to profit from a crime but his virtue was unshakable. We can only admire our hero, who has shown justice as well as prescient *mētis*.

In this tradition, Lykourgos, the future lawgiver, sacrifices personal ambition in the name of the law. In this sense he resembles the Sicilian Charondas, who takes his own life after unwittingly violating his own law (Diod. 12.19.1–2). Similar anecdotes are told also about other *nomothetai*. Lykourgos made his fellow citizens swear not to change the laws until his return to Sparta. Then, after having obtained from Delphi validation of those laws, he held his compatriots to their word for ever, by letting himself die (Plut. *Lyk.* 29; Szegedy-Maszak (1978) 206–8, Hölkeskamp (1999) 51–3). Lykourgos shows the same spirit of sacrifice when he gives up a kingship that belongs to his infant nephew.⁴⁵

Here a common narrative motif in the “legend of the lawgiver” is varied to take into account the unique aspects of Spartan political culture. Compare the above story with the Herodotean tale about another Spartan, Theras (Hdt. 4.147–9). Theras was the eponymous *oikistēs* of the Aegean island community of Thera and he, like Lykourgos, was a regent: he was the maternal uncle and guardian of Eurysthenes and Prokles. When the two boys came of age and took the *basileia*, says Herodotos, Theras left Sparta to establish a colony on the island previously named Kalliste, which he ruled and to which he gave his name. He did this because “he could not brook to be a subject (*archesthai*) when he had had a taste of supreme power (*archē*)” (Hdt. 4.147.3, trans. Godley). The situation is very similar to that of Lykourgos – a regent who leaves the city – but the motivations of the two men are different. The attitude of Theras is – to use a modern term – pre-political. Theras does not know how to respect the essential rule of life of the *polis*, which rests on the alternation of civic roles: “to rule and to be ruled,” *archein* and *archesthai*. The ability to “*archein*” and “*archesthai*” is an eminently political virtue,

according to Aristotle's famous reflection (*Pol.* 3.1277a25–b32). The issue is here slanted in Spartan terms, with reference to *basileia*. Theras has to go back to *archesthai* after having assumed a role that gives him the highest honors and allows him to imagine what it would be to *archein* for life.⁴⁶ Eventually he settles exclusively on the latter role: he founds a colony in which he will be king, solely *archein*.

Like Theras, Lykourgos is a regent who distances himself from home, but unlike him he does not do so through personal ambition. He is a deeply righteous man wrongly accused. He loves his community so much that he agrees to return and serve it. The details of the tradition on Lykourgos are designed to portray his choice as extremely difficult. In contrast to Theras who is inflamed by ambition (*philotimia*), Lykourgos is characterized by political virtue. He would have been willing to submit to *archesthai*, even after having tasted the pleasures of *archein*.

The connection between Lykourgos and the temptations of *basileia* expressed a deep preoccupation of the Spartan community: that the king should be able to uphold and respect the law. Sparta maintained *basileia*, but submitted it to a very rigorous application of *nomos*. There was an oath sworn monthly between the ephors and the kings:

They exchange monthly oaths, the ephors on behalf of the city and the king on his own behalf. The king's oath is that he will rule in accordance with the established laws of the city; *the oath* of the city is that it, as long as he abides by his oath, will support his kingship unshaken (*Xen. Lak. Pol.* 15.7, trans. D.F. Jackson, modified).

It is often argued that legislators represent a threat to the autonomy of law.⁴⁷ It is easy to understand, therefore, that in Sparta there was no desire to tie the origin of the *nomoi* to the *basileia*, since the kings themselves had to obey the *nomoi*. The temporary status of the regent suited those who wanted to develop myths about the respect of the laws shown by an extremely powerful and virtuous individual. A case that may have fueled, by way of contrast, the choice to portray Lykourgos as a regent is that of the victor of Plataia, Pausanias.⁴⁸ He too was a regent who was accused and forced out. Pausanias' story presents many similarities with those of Theras and Lykourgos. Among the reasons that led the Spartans to kill Pausanias, there was fear (probably not entirely unfounded) that he could not acquiesce in his limited, transitional royal power (cf. *Thuc.* 1.132.1–2). This suggestion is made more plausible by the strong connections that the poet Simonides – who as we saw treated the topic of Lykourgos' regency – had with Sparta precisely in Pausanias' times.⁴⁹

4.4 Lykourgos' Revolutions

We noted above that the legendary biography of Lykourgos was told in two versions, as regards the moment in which he carries out his reform. When the *nomothetēs* legislates during his regency (Hdt. 1.65.4–5; Just. 3.2.5), it is possible – we may assume – to emphasize his ability to retire after having performed the supreme *euergesia* towards the *polis*, the legislation. Conversely Lykourgos' premature termination of his regency (recounted by Ephoros and Plutarch) is highly appropriate to the economy of the “legend of the lawgiver.” This event creates a narrative excuse for journeys of enlightenment, allowing the legislator to learn the customs and laws of different people (Szegedy-Maszak (1978), 202, Hölkeskamp (1999) 45–6). In this case, however, one has to explain how Lykourgos returned to power, and part of the tradition describes this return as revolutionary. We could suspect that the account about Lykourgos' *coup d'état* was a legitimizing anticipation of the third-century revolutionary movements, or that it was a memory of events from the archaic history of Sparta. But the stories about Lykourgos' revolution were already narrated by the late fourth century BC: therefore the former hypothesis would be certainly wrong, and on the basis of the same evidence the latter would seem very risky.

As far as we know, the author of the *Lakedaimoniōn Politeia* attributed to Aristotle was indeed the first to tell the story of Lykourgos' revolution (fr. 537 Rose *ap. Plut. Lyk.* 5.12). According to some Hellenistic writers the first *gerontes* were the partisans of Lykourgos who came in arms with him into the *agora* to frighten any potential opponent. This theory surfaces already in the *Lakedaimoniōn Politeia* attributed to Aristotle. It seems that the main adversaries were supposed to be the kings that “Aristotle” did not include among the first thirty helpmates of the lawgiver. In fact, the *Politeia* branded Charilaos' government as tyrannical (fr. 611.10 Rose), as Aristotle in *Politics* already did (V 1316a34). However, we can presume – since narratives are lost – that Lykourgos' persuasion, backed by Apollo's words (the “Great” *Rhētra*), finally forced both kings to share their power with the twenty-eight *gerontes*. Unfortunately it is not clear what Ephoros had to say on this point. But Plato had given a logical political premise to the description of the kings' initial unwillingness to collaborate, with a remark aptly cited by Plutarch in the same context (*Lyk.* 5.10). Plato said that the Spartan lawgiver had imposed a due limit to the feverish and self-seeking power of the kings (*Laws* 3.691e–692a: the wider context of this passage is echoed by Plutarch in *Lyk.* 7.3–5). Xenophon instead envisaged a precocious unity of purpose between Lykourgos and “the most powerful citizens” (*Lak. Pol.* 8.1).⁵⁰

It is seemingly hard to reconcile the Aristotelian view of Charilaos' tyrannical power with Plutarch's statements, that the entire *polis* longed for Lykourgos' return, because the common people felt the lack of a sure guidance, in so far as the kings were weak, and the kings themselves hoped that Lykourgos could

help them to regain the due respect of the masses (*Lyk.* 5.1–2). The ancients appear to be aware of the problem: Plutarch described the times of disorder before Lykourgos' reform as oscillating between despotic and feeble reigns (*Lyk.* 2.4–6 cf. 7.3–5). Plutarch's Charilaos seems to be affected by the latter flaw. The young king, scared by the sight of Lykourgos' supporters, fled into the sanctuary of Athena Chalkioikos, but then joined the movement, only to be belittled by his colleague (*Plut. Lyk.* 5.8–9).⁵¹ Apparently, Plutarch had to put together diverse notions and anecdotes of diverse origin about the conditions of pre-Lykourgan Sparta and was able to form a coherent picture. Plutarch represented a society in need of amendment in each of its parts. Only through Lykourgos' reform did Sparta attain the balance of members that characterizes a mixed constitution of aristocratic temper. All fell short of political virtue and of the Lykourgan standard: kings, masses and the wealthy.

The wealthy too are said to have been at first unable to endure the beneficent changes promoted by Lykourgos. According to Plutarch, a series of regulations aiming to attack luxury and the passion for wealth – redistribution of land, introduction of the iron currency and *syssitia* – caused deep resentment among them (*Lyk.* 8–11). Here the most dramatic moment of Lykourgos' reforms is reached. The rich were furious, and stoned Lykourgos, who had to flee and take refuge in the sanctuary of Athena Chalkioikos (*Plut. Lyk.* 11.1–2, cf. *Plut. Mor.* 227a). One particularly stubborn pursuer of Lykourgos, a youth called Alkandros, knocked the lawgiver's eye out with a stick. Lykourgos confronted his opponents with his disfigured and bloody face, and they repented. Alkandros was handed over to Lykourgos, who took him into his own service. Thence Alkandros recognized Lykourgos' exceptional human qualities. The edifying tale ends with the perfect education of the rebellious: “a criminal, wilful adolescent ... became the most civil and responsible man” (trans. R.J.A. Talbert). Alkandros's story was widely known in Roman times, but we cannot ascertain its antiquity.⁵² It plainly epitomized the positive effect of the Spartan education, and illustrated Lykourgos' brave, austere and mild temper.

The third-century revolutionary movements in Sparta, guided by Agis IV and Kleomenes III, were substantially inspired by the myth of Lykourgan Sparta and by the desire to bring back the city's pristine glory. The myth inspired and justified the actions of the reformers, but the latter also gave new form to the myth. How much influence the third-century upheaval can be expected to exert on our main source, Plutarch's writings on Sparta, involves a thorny problem of sources. To compose the lives of Lykourgos, Lysandros, Agesilaos, Agis and Kleomenes, and the *Sayings of the Spartans*, a preparatory work for biographies of greater literary ambition, Plutarch read a wide range of writings about Lykourgos' city. He was acquainted with Plato's dialogues and with the works of Aristotle and his school, among which the Aristotelian *Lakedaimoniōn Politeia* stands out. Plutarch could attain a direct

view of the personalities and the ideas of the revolutionary kings through Phylarchos, an historian sympathetic with Kleomenes' ideas and whose work Plutarch drew on heavily for his biographies of the revolutionary kings, Agis IV and Kleomenes. Another important source is the third-century biographer Hermippos, who was also probably acquainted with the image of Lykourgos promoted by the revolutionaries. Plutarch also had access to the writings of later Spartan writers, such as the late Hellenistic or Roman-era scholar Sosibios, whose attitudes to the revolution are uncertain (Lévy (2007)). In the *Life of Lykourgos* direct and explicit indication of the use of late third-century writers is scanty. Recognizing "sources" is all the more difficult since we possess nothing but shadowy fragments of most of the works that Plutarch read. Tracing third-century developments of Lykourgos' legend in the writings of Plutarch is therefore often conjectural.⁵³

Some cases seem straightforward enough: the revolutionaries shrewdly reused earlier material. No doubt, as we already saw, Kleomenes III modified the received tradition about the creation of the ephorate, to justify his own action. The king is said to have alluded to the example of Lykourgos to excuse his own violence and to invite undecided and puzzled Spartans to collaborate as Charilaos had (Plut. *Kleom.* 10.8–9). But, as we also saw, the details of Lykourgos' upheaval were not merely a product of (later) propaganda from the revolutions of the third century (cf. Tigerstedt (1965–1978) II, 77–8). Kleomenes' revolutionary coup reached a much higher degree of violence than Lykourgos' coup, since the king's men killed four of the five ephors and about ten other citizens (Plut. *Kleom.* 8). But Kleomenes, Phylarchos and Plutarch were inclined to stress the similarity, while minimizing the difference. Greek civil wars often involved brutal ferocity. Lykourgos, rather, appears to be more victim than author of violence,⁵⁴ and the traditional account emphasizes his skill in carrying out his revolution by the mere threat of arms and fascinating dignity, as well as the readiness of the opponents to change their mind and to collaborate for the city's good. Such a depiction predated the third century.

Sometimes coincidences suggest that the revolutionaries partially "rewrote" Lykourgos' biography and that Plutarch had access to their works. The moral and social situation of Sparta before Lykourgos' reform, characterized by inequality, poverty among the masses, insolence, envy, wickedness and self-indulgence (*Lyk.* 8.2–3) is described in a way not dissimilar to third-century Sparta as sketched in *Agis* 5.5–7, probably following Phylarchos. The conventional picture of Sparta before the Lykourgan reform is likely to be inspired by the third-century revolution. In the affair of the infant Charilaos, Leonidas, the brother of Polydektēs' widow, accuses Lykourgos of conspiracy against the little boy (Plut. *Lyk.* 3.8). Another Leonidas, son of Kleombrotos, was the rival and colleague of the reformer king Agis IV. The historical Leonidas found himself in a situation very similar to that of Lykourgos, but a

situation that ended very differently. Leonidas was the guardian of Areus II, son of Akrotatos who had died leaving his wife pregnant. When Areus II died in infancy, Leonidas became king.⁵⁵ But coincidences may mislead. One could be impressed by the fact that Charilaos took refuge in the sanctuary of Athena Chalkioikos (Plut. *Lyk.* 5.8), and that the aforementioned Leonidas did likewise (Plut. *Agis* 11.8). But the very same thing was said of Lykourgos (Plut. *Mor.* 227a); and Pausanias, the victor of Plataia, famously sought refuge in the same sanctuary (Thuc. I 134).

An extremely idealized picture of Lykourgos' laws was also created by adding new features to his reform and by subtracting others. This phenomenon is obviously not confined to the third century. We saw that already in the fourth century the creation of the ephorate was detached from Lykourgos and given to Theopompos. Sometimes Plutarch defends Lykourgos against allegations explicit or implicit. According to Aristotle, Lykourgos had vainly tried everything to make Spartan women act with more modesty and sobriety, and finally had abandoned them to their immoderation and excessive power (*Pol.* 2.1270a 6–8). This criticism was clearly aimed rather at the ill-reputed Spartan women than at the lawgiver. To Plutarch, however, and perhaps also to a source of his, it amounted also to a charge against Lykourgos. Therefore he contested Aristotle's statement, by speaking of the physical education of the women and by hazardingly defending the morality of their famously licentious conduct (Plut. *Lyk.* 14–15).⁵⁶ The biographer admitted, however, that in this case Spartan morality could have later degenerated (*Lyk.* 15.16).

A more interesting case is the *krypteia*. Plutarch knows the version of the *krypteia* given by the Aristotelian *Lakedaimoniōn Politeia*, which involves the brutal killing of helots. Scholars are divided concerning the relationship between Plutarch's account and the seemingly different *krypteia* described by Plato, who says nothing of such killing (*Laws* 1.633b–c). The exact nature of the *krypteia* is also much disputed. Plutarch was persuaded that Lykourgos would never have created such a wicked and barbarous custom as the *Lakedaimoniōn Politeia* portrayed, and hypothesized that the *krypteia* was introduced after the stubborn helot revolt that followed the famous earthquake at Sparta of the mid 460s.⁵⁷

The last two cases may help us understand the tradition on the *rhētra* of Epitadeus.⁵⁸ According to Plutarch (*Agis* 5.1–7), an ephor named Epitadeus, enraged with his son, promoted a law that allowed citizens to pass ownership of their own house and *klēros* (allotment of land) to whomever they wished. Plutarch dates this *rhētra* sometime after 404 BC. The law – according to the biographer – ruined the “perfect *politeia* of Lykourgos.” It disrupted the original balance of landed property, which had previously been transmitted regularly from father to son. The tremendous differences in wealth among the Spartiates in the mid-third century were, in Plutarch's opinion, a consequence

of Epitadeus' action. Aristotle had lamented *the absence* in Spartan law of a limitation on the transfer of property by gift in life or death (*Pol.* 2.1270a18–22). It is not easy to take Aristotle's statement as a reference to Epitadeus' law, and much has been said against the law's historicity. One should also pay attention to Epitadeus' "significant name." "Epitadeus" means literally someone "who acts in his own interests," and the character Epitadeus is credited correspondingly with having proposed a bill to satisfy his personal interests. Mythical or fictive characters often have a name in line with their acts. Epitadeus therefore is probably a fictitious character (Nafissi (2008) 72–84). He neatly explains away a flaw in the Lykourgan legislation observed by Aristotle in the *Politics*: Epitadeus and not the great lawgiver was thus responsible for degeneration. Much in the same vein, another defect pointed out by Aristotle in the same passage of the *Politics* was removed by crediting Lykourgos with a relevant measure. Aristotle addressed the issue of the large dowries given to Spartan girls, in his view a reason for the excessive extent of female land-ownership (*Pol.* 2.1270a25f.). But in the third century the notion surfaces that Lykourgos had indeed prohibited dowries.⁵⁹ Once more, the great lawgiver was not to blame.

The *rhētra* of Epitadeus and the Lykourgan law on dowries have an obvious relevance to our understanding of Spartan society and economics, subjects of lively argument among modern scholars. Together with the idea of an equal distribution of land by Lykourgos (*Polyb.* 6. 45; *Plut. Lyk.* 8), the notion of *klēroi* regularly transmitted from father to son is crucial for those who suppose that the traditional system of Spartan land tenure, disrupted by Epitadeus' law, was based on an ancient egalitarian distribution of land and was strictly regulated by the *polis*, in order to preserve the number of the possessors of the land lots. As T.J. Figueira has written, one can consider classical conditions "either as the 'normalization' of a previous 'special' regime for landholding or ... as the playing out of inherent and demographic forces within a system that had always approximated arrangements elsewhere, ones characterized by households exercising wide discretion over property acquisition, usage, and alienation" (Figueira (2004) 48, cf. this work, [chapter 22](#)). S. Hodkinson champions the latter position. He denies that Sparta experienced an ancient egalitarian distribution of land and suggests that in classical times Spartan landed properties were transmitted to male and female heirs and were private and alienable (Hodkinson (2000), 65–112). Hodkinson has emphasized the impact of the third-century revolution on the image of Lykourgos' work concerning property and wealth. In his opinion, strong emphasis upon equality as Lykourgos' fundamental purpose stemmed from that revolution in Hellenistic times. According to Hodkinson, third-century propaganda elaborated the tradition of a Lykourgan cancellation of debts,⁶⁰ and redistribution of land, where the numbers of land lots distributed by Lykourgos, or by Lykourgos and king Polydoros, are variously given.⁶¹ The third-century revolution certainly left its mark on alleged Lykourgan political

and social measures. The exact extent of third-century intervention in the tradition of Sparta's egalitarian property arrangements is, however, uncertain.⁶² For instance, the notion that the land had been divided in equal lots existed already in the fourth century, when it was related to the Heraklid foundation of Sparta.⁶³ The number of nine thousand *klēroi* was not an outright arbitrary invention. Its exact origin is uncertain, but the concept of the “nine thousand *klēroi*” was probably continuously preserved and strengthened by a famous ceremony described by Plutarch (*Lyk.* 16.1–2). The eldest of the tribesmen checked the physical aspect of infants, and in case of malformation let them die of exposure. A fit newborn was reared, and the tribesmen recognized also his right to possess (i.e. to inherit) one of the nine thousand *klēroi* (that is, a part of the land that had been supposedly distributed among the Spartans when the Heraklids had conquered Laconia, or by Lykourgos). Since a law, obviously ascribed to Lykourgos, made illegal the selling of the “original land lot,” the Spartans presumed that every citizen still possessed a part of his original possession (Heracl. *Lemb. Exc. Polit.* 12 Dilts; Plut. *Mor.* 238e). This juridical category of land conveyed the ideas both of a primeval land distribution and of a regular transmission of landed property from father to son, partially justifying the claim expressed in the tradition about Epitadeus. However, neither a fourth-century origin for belief in an ancient equality at Sparta, nor the existence of the ceremony of presentation to the elders invalidates Hodkinson's model of Spartan land tenure.

4.5 Conclusions

In enquiring about the historicity of Lykourgos, we should beware of deep-rooted, modern assumptions. Scholars for more than a century have minimized the importance of *legend* about Lykourgos in Spartan culture of the fifth century – almost as if his widespread presence in fifth-century discourse implied that he and his activities were historical. We should recognize instead that myth about the legislator played an active role in Sparta's culture from the archaic period onwards. The Spartans attributed to Lykourgos a broad political role and his legendary activities were linked to the “Great” *Rhētra*. The figure of the lawgiver later attracted rules, institutions, episodes and “documents” from various periods, such as the oracles eventually published by king Pausanias. Among these there was at least one that originally had nothing to do with Lykourgos.⁶⁴ At the culmination of this process, in the fifth century, the whole edifice of political and social standards at Sparta was attributed to Lykourgos. There were different stories about him, some mutually contradictory, sometimes even “documented” by texts such as the Disk of Iphitos.

Historians and scholars of the late-classical, Hellenistic and Roman Imperial

times tried, each with his own principles and intellectual resources, to organize this often peripheral and inconsistent material which continued to be fueled by ever-changing local traditions. Every period in Sparta had a slightly different Lykourgos. Lykourgos' character, laws and customs were redefined through additions and subtractions. An important factor in this development was the idea that Sparta had undergone decline. This notion offered the opportunity to credit Lykourgos with the creation of an ideal, perfect structure, different from the real Sparta, a structure which later ages, affected by moral and political decay, were responsible for disrupting.

An enduring element, on the other hand, was admiration for the man, coupled with a substantially idealized image about the origin of the Spartan institutions. Today, only fragments remain of all this effort to create coherent portraits of Lykourgos, with a single exception: the biography of the lawgiver masterfully elaborated by Plutarch. Yet, to the ears of contemporary scholars, Plutarch's words about divergent and contradictory traditions do not sound as ominous as they did to the great historians of the past. They are rather an invitation to define better the different layers and elements that make up the complex tradition on Lykourgos and to understand the wealth of information that antiquity has left us about him.

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FURTHER READING

Generally on Greek tradition concerning lawgivers see Szegedy-Maszak (1978) and Hölkeskamp (1999). For a basic, systematic account of the ancient

literature on Lykourgos (and for positions different from those presented here), see the useful essay by David (2007b). The contribution of E. Meyer (1892a), although now dated by his over-critical attitude towards the oldest traditions on Lykourgos, still represents a valuable methodological model for all scholarship on the topic. Among more recent essays, Kōiv (2005) is an appropriate corrective to Meyer's skepticism, even if rather too optimistic about our ability to identify elements of tradition dating back to the archaic era. Paradiso (1995, 2000) offers some important clarifications on the tradition of the fifth century and the ancient historical perspectives on Lykourgos. Hölkeskamp (2010) provides a compressed but exciting portrait of Lykourgos and the historical narratives of his myth in ancient Sparta and in modern times. Not particularly enlightening, however, is the synthesis offered by Lewis (2007). For the 'Great' *Rhētra* I would refer to Nafissi (2010).

NOTES

- 1 Some scholars suggested that Herodotos – who in 1.65 introduces the character of Lykourgos while presenting the story of sixth-century Sparta – conflated the notion of a very ancient Lykourgos with genuine memories of reforms at Sparta in the early sixth century BC. This theory has been quite influential. It is owed partly to Niese (1907a), 445–6, who emphasized the later, retrospective character of traditions that give Lykourgos a precise chronological position associated with Leobotes or Charilaos. The theory was defended among others by Wade-Gery (1925), 562, and best explored by Andrewes (1938), 92–3. Gomme (1945) 128–31, referred to this passage in Herodotos as a “well-known crux,” and declared it an extreme example of “carefree chronology” in Herodotos. The desire to find confirmation in the literary tradition of historical inferences drawn from archaeological data has contributed to the fortunes of this thesis (see now David (2007b) 116–18). Finley's influential idea of a “sixth-century revolution” (Finley (1968) esp. 146), for all his skepticism on the value of the archaeological evidence, is partly based on Andrewes' interpretation of Herodotos 1.65. The commentary of Asheri (Asheri, Lloyd and Corcella (2007) ad loc.) highlights the inherent contradictions of this line of thinking: it assumes the existence of these vague memories and simultaneously admits that Herodotos knew the different chronology of Lykourgos based on the royal lists. Bichler (2004) 217, has a similar approach. But there is no proof of the existence of these memories. Herodotos actually lacked interest in defining the chronology of events such as Lykourgos' legislation which fell outside the historical period which is his main focus (Vannicelli (1993) 37–8, 45), and we should admit that some of his details on archaic history do not lend themselves to

- plausible historical reconstruction (Hornblower (1991) 53–4; Paradiso (1995) 37–8, 43–4).
- 2 Chrimes (1949) 305–47, Hammond (1950) 57, Michell (1952) 22–3, Den Boer (1954) 104–14, 154 and n. 1, Huxley (1962) 7, 42; Forrest (1963) 168–70, 174–5.
- 3 Szegedy-Maszak (1978), Hölkeskamp (1999) 44–59; see, for instance, traditions on the spreading of the ashes of the lawgiver which impressed Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1884) 271. David raises the good question whether the legend of Lykourgos was heavily modelled on that of Solon – a possibility obscured by Szegedy-Maszak's structuralist approach: see David (2007b) 124.
- 4 The term “Great *Rhētra*” does not actually occur anywhere in the sources; though see Plutarch *Lyk.* 13, *Ages.* 26.5, *Mor.* 997c.
- 5 Plato and Aristotle have an important role: on Plato see Powell (1994), on Aristotle Schütrumpf (1994), Bertelli (2004), and on both Hodkinson (2005). Tigerstedt also contributes useful chapters (1965–1978). The Athenian culture of Xenophon has been seen as influencing his portrait of Lykourgos (David (2007a): cf. Hodkinson (2005) 239–43). The Lykourgos of Plutarch has strongly Platonic coloring (De Blois (2005)), and is also influenced by the culture of the age of Trajan (Desideri (2002)). There is also a literary production from Sparta itself: details on Lykourgos and his *politeia* are the typical form of Spartan “local historiography,” see Tober (2010). The number of writers involved, however, may not extend (much) beyond King Pausanias, on whom see later. For Thibron (early fourth century), to whom is ascribed a *Politeia* of Sparta, see Lupi (2010). For Lysandros’s *logos* on *politeia* see Powell (2010) 121–5.
- 6 The expression originates with Ollier (1933–1943).
- 7 Lykourgos “not only made it illegal but also impious to disobey the laws endorsed by the Pythia” (Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 8.5, trans. M. Lipka).
- 8 Plut. *Agis* 4–6.2, 9.4, 10, *Kleom.* 10. See generally David (2007b) 130–2.
- 9 Liv. 38, 34.1–3; 39.33.6, 36.4; Plut. *Philop.* 16.9: Ducat (2006) xi. Contra: Spawforth (2012) 91f.
- 10 Lykourgan customs: see e.g. *IG V* 1.500, 543. Scourging of the ephebes at Orthia: Paus. 3.16.7–11 and other evidence in Kennell (1995) 149–61; with this new, post-classical rite, a marvellous story was elaborated about Lykourgos’ ability to satisfy the blood-lusting goddess without having recourse to human sacrifice; Spawforth (2012) 92–5 suggests an Augustan dating for the introduction of the ritual; sanctuary of Athena Optiletis: cf. Paus. 3.18.2; statues: Paus. 3.14.8 (in the gymnasium of Platanistas); *SEG*

xi.773; 810 (fourth century AD; near the theater?); location of the cult: Plut. *Lyk.* 31.4–5, Paus. 3.16.6; cf. Cartledge–Spawforth (1989) 197–207; specifically on the cult see Hupfloher (2000) 178–82.

- 11 Cf. Kennell (1995) with Ducat (2006) and Hodkinson (2000) 19–64 with Figueira (2004) 54–61 respectively.
- 12 Absence of cult for legislators: see McGlew (1993) 109. Besides Hdt. 1. 65–66.1, where the Delphic oracular response seems to address also the question of the form of worship of Lykourgos, divine or heroic (cf. e.g. Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1884) 274; Ehrenberg (1925) 13; Andrewes (1956) 76), see Ephoros *FGrH* 70 F 118; Arist. fr. 534 Rose *ap.* Plut. *Lyk.* 31.4; Nic. Dam. *FGrH* 90 F 56.2; Paus. 3.16.6. On the cult of the *theos* Lykourgos in the imperial age see above n. 10. Lykourgos and Herakles were considered *archēgetai* of the *polis* in an inscription of the second century AD = *SEG* xliv.361.
- 13 Cult of the *oikistēs*: see Malkin (1987). Divine cult: see e.g. Tennes on Tenedos, Lesky (1934) 502–3, Autolykos at Sinope (Strabo 12.3.11) and Phalanthos at Taras (Just. 3.4.18; *SEG* xxxiv.1020–1021), whose legend (Just. 3.4.13–16) tellingly follows in some ways the pattern of traditions about lawgivers; cf. similar stories about Solon (Plut. *Sol.* 32.4; Diog. Laert. 1.62 with Crat. fr. 246 K.-A.) and Lykourgos (Just. 3.3.11 f.; Aristocr. *FGrH* 591 F 3).
- 14 See Oliva (1971) 63–6, with bibliography. Beloch (1912–1927) I², 253 n. 1, for example, shows the usual confidence: “in the case of Lykourgos, who was honored as a god in Sparta, and bears a name etymologically so transparent, the burden of proof falls on those who deny his divinity.” But the etymology was debated: Beloch (1912–1927) I², 2, 254, interpreted “Lykourgos” as “Light weaver” or “light bringer” (Λυκοίεργος; from the roots *λυκ-, “light”, and ἔργον, “work”), arguing against those who (like Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1884) 285), inclined towards “mood/anger of a wolf” (Λυκοίоргος; from λυίκοσ and ο’ργηί). Today many accept “he who wards off the wolf” (from the root (φ)έρπω): Chantraine (1968) 650, Burkert (1979) 165–6 n. 24. Recently, the divine character of Lykourgos has been asserted by Bringmann (1999) 72.
- 15 Many argue, however, that the figure of Lykourgos was not yet well known among the Greeks, and that there were competing traditions on the origins of the Spartan customs and laws: see e.g. Busolt (1893–1904) I 578, Hölkeskamp (2010) 320–1, *contra* Ehrenberg (1925) 12–13, Köiv (2003) 162–3, and (2005) 239–40.
- 16 Discussion of why one version established itself as against others is necessarily inconclusive (Meyer (1892a) 276 n. 2; Busolt (1893–1904) I²,

- 570-1, Den Boer (1954) 6, 12–13, Tigerstedt (1965–1978) I 378 n. 563 with bibliography: see e.g. David (2007b) 122) because scholars underestimate the antiquity of the tradition on Lykourgos. The respective antiquity of the two versions cannot be established.
- 17 Fantasia (2003) 376, *pace* Gomme (1956) 107.
 - 18 Busolt (1893–1904) I 573 n. 3, Kōiv (2005) 249 n. 92. The calculation has thirteen generations averaging one-third of a century each, from Archidamos to Charilaos, and not ten generations averaging forty years. To accept Mosshammer's argument (1979) 179, that the calculation takes into account synchronicity with Homer (who, according to Herodotos, lived 400 years before his own day: 2.53), we must imagine that Thucydides already knew the tradition of the meeting between the two, known to Ephoros (*FGrH* 70 F 149.19). Ephoros' organization of the legend of Lykourgos and generally his vision of the institutions and history of Sparta greatly influenced later writers: see Tigerstedt (1965–1978) I 210–11, Christesen (2010).
 - 19 See, however, Gomme (1945) 130: "he says nothing of Lycurgus, and in this he *may* [Gomme's emphasis] be consciously following Hellanikos" – and e.g. Thommen (1996) 30.
 - 20 Paradiso (2000) 377 underlines the implicit reference to the Spartan *eunomia* in Pindar's conception: although functionally parallel to the tradition of Lykourgos, it is not incompatible with it (see also later).
 - 21 If the *Rhētra* was conceived as an oracle transformed into law (Nafissi (2010) 109–10), the participles in the singular accusative indicate a connection with Lykourgos. It has been assumed that the participles were originally dual accusatives, that the kings were the ones who carried out its provisions, and that the text was revised: Bringmann (1975) 356–62, cf. e.g. Parke and Wormell (1956) I 90; recently also Dreher (2006), 55, argues that the text of the *Rhētra* has been modified in order to bring it into line with the new tradition, which saw it as received by Lykourgos. But if this different original text had been known in the fifth century, the consistent agreement (from Herodotos onwards) on the Lykourgan paternity of the *gerousia* would be puzzling.
 - 22 Xenophon's view is echoed by Plutarch (*Lyk.* 1.5 f.), who feels compelled to explain that κατὰ τοῦς Ἡρακλίδας is to be understood as a reference to the time of the return of the Heraklidai. There is not a plausible alternative to his interpretation, which is obviously right. The reasons for Xenophon's choice are explored by Paradiso (2000) 385–91 and David (2007a) 301–3, who argue that Xenophon's chronology was non-traditional: for the relationship of this chronology with the *Rhētra* see Lévy (1977) 95, Nafissi

- 23 The different viewpoints depend primarily on differences of opinion about the relationship between the *Rhētra* and Tyrtaios fr. 1^b G.-P., fr. 4 W. (ap. Plut. *Lyk.* 6.10): for a summary of opinions see Nafissi (2010) 98–9 and 111. Tyrtaios’ apparent lack of reference to Lykourgos has always been judged to supply a valid argument from silence: David (2007b) 68–9.
- 24 Hdt. 1. 65, Thuc. 1.18, Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 1.1–2, Ephor. *FGrH* 70 F 118, Arist. *Pol.* 7.1333b12–26, Diod. 7.12.8, Plut. *Lyk.* 29.10. Wickersham (1994) 119–50, Paradiso (1995), Cataldi (1996).
- 25 This is an aspect neglected by Kōiv (2005).
- 26 Meyer (1892a) 233–5, Ehrenberg (1925) 14–17, 124 n. 9, Jacoby *FGrH* 582 with commentary, David (1979) 94–116, Nafissi (1991) 51–71, Richer (1998) 25–43, Van Wees (1999) 14–22, Luther (2004) 25–8, Sordi (2004), Bertelli (2004), 19, Kōiv (2005) 240–1, 246–7, Ducat (2006), 42–5, Nafissi (2010) 101–2, Lupi (2010) 144–5, Tober (2010) 416–19. The theory that the tradition of the creation of the ephorate by Theopompos was fabricated by Pausanias – the idea originates with Meyer (1892a) 249–50 – is still defended by many scholars: Bertelli (2004) 22–4, 46; David (2007a) 300, 305–6; David (2007b) 121, 125 n. 35; Kennell (2010) 103; Tober (2010) 417 n. 35.
- 27 The discussion of this point is made difficult by a *lacuna* in Strabo’s codices and by tangled modern debate: according to E. Meyer’s proposed restoration, Pausanias’ work was *περὶ τῶν Λυκούργου νοίμων* “on the laws of Lykourgos” (Meyer (1892a), 235), but the Vatican Palimpsest, whose reading was unknown to Meyer, shows that the supplement previously suggested by some nineteenth-century scholars, *κατὰ τῶν Λυκούργου νοίμων* “against the laws of Lykourgos,” has the support of the manuscript tradition. We therefore have an old conjecture against a perfectly satisfactory manuscript reading, which has been widely accepted: cf. for instance Ehrenberg (1925) 14–15, Jacoby *FGrH* 582, *Noten* 361.3. We possess various transcripts of the palimpsest which on this point are unanimous: Aly (1956) 9, Baladié 1978, 45–6, cf. Radt (2002–2010) I, ix–x). David (1979) unnecessarily questions the validity of the reading of the palimpsest, and proposes a return to the emendation *περὶ* or alternatively to interpret “against the laws of Lykourgos” as an ironic title: David (1979) 98. In this way he brought the discussion back to its starting point, and the topic seemed to end in a *non liquet* (for example Kōiv (2005) 240 n. 45 cf. 246 nn. 77–8). But Ducat (2006) 42–4 has demonstrated that only “against the Laws of Lykourgos” gives meaning to Strabo’s text, that it cannot be understood as a title, and therefore it cannot be understood as ironic. Strabo’s text should be consulted using Radt’s edition: Baladié’s *Belles*

Lettres text (1978) may here mislead.

- 28 Diod. 7.12.1–6; Oenom. ap. Euseb. *Praep. Evang.* 5.27–8; Parke and Wormell (1956): II nos. 21, 216–18, 220, 222. See Kōiv (2005) 241 n. 46 and Tober (2010) 418 n. 38 with bibliography; Christesen (2010) 219 and n. 20, expresses caution, but the similarity between 7.12.3 and Ephor. *FGrH* 70F 149.16, which he himself notes, makes the conclusion virtually certain.
- 29 An important milestone established by Kōiv (2005) 247: it is incorrect to attribute to Pausanias manipulations of the oracle. The reworking of Tyrt. fr. 1^a and °14 G.-P. (=4 W.) in Diod. 7.12.6 was present already in the royal archives: Nafissi (2010) 93–102.
- 30 Aristotle knew that “the king Pausanias” tried to overthrow the power of the ephors (*Pol.* 5.1301b17–21). This remark is often connected to Pausanias’ writings “against” (or “on”) the laws of Lykourgos. On this basis, scholars relate the development of the tradition about Theopompos and the first ephors to Pausanias’ book in two different ways. The common postulate is that Pausanias noticed that there was no mention of the ephors in the oracles. The now preferred hypothesis is that Pausanias claimed that the Spartans had wrongly added the ephors to the laws of Lykourgos; according to this hypothesis, Pausanias wrote that Theopompos, and not Lykourgos, established the office of the ephors. According to other historians, this notion was instead developed in Sparta as a reaction to Pausanias’ attempt to cast a shadow over Lykourgos, accusing him of arbitrarily creating the ephorate, without divine support. Lupi ((2012) 84–93) has, however, shown that Aristotles’ “king Pausanias” is probably the victor of Plataia.
- 31 The verses by Tyrtaios influenced also the ancient interpretation of the *Rhētra*. His source, the author of the Aristotelian *Politeia Lakedaimoniōn*, reconciled the tradition about oracles given to Lykourgos with Tyrtaios’ claim about a prophecy brought to Sparta by Theopompos and Polydoros (Tyrt. fr. 1^b G.-P. = 4 W.). To that end, he suggested (Plutarch, *Lyk.* 6.7–9) that it was the kings Theopompos and Polydoros who introduced surreptitiously the final clause into the *Rhētra*. According to this reconstruction, elaborated in compliance with Aristotle’s principles of political doctrine, the political institutions of Sparta witnessed after Lykourgos a further refinement. As a well-structured mixed constitution, Sparta acquired a more accurate balance between government bodies and social bodies: the *damos* lost free speech in the assembly, but it gained the ephors. See Nafissi (2010) 103.
- 32 It is unclear how and why the theory of the Cretan origin of the Spartan laws was formulated. It is often thought that the idea was suggested by the

similarities between the laws of Sparta and Crete (Niese (1907a) 443, Ehrenberg (1925) 12, Paradiso (1995) 40). Perhaps certain Cretan communities had an interest in defining their relations with a preeminent city of the motherland. Lyktos in particular had declared itself a colony of Sparta even before Ephoros (*FGrH* 70 F 149.17); it was accordingly maintained that Lykourgos had visited Lyktos (cf. Arist. *Pol.* 2.1271b24–32: see Perlman (1992) 199–201 and esp. (2005) 317–19). In Sparta, the Cretan thesis would be acceptable because it established Sparta’s autonomy from other Dorian cities. The outcome was paradoxical, however, because the originality of Sparta’s laws might be a source of patriotic pride. In his *Funeral Oration* the Thucydidean Perikles flaunts the originality of Athenian laws, evidently alluding to the Cretan origin of the Spartan *nomima* (2.37.1); it is known from Ephoros’ polemic that some argued that Cretan institutions were derived from those of Sparta (Nafissi (1983–1984); Cuniberti (2000), 103–4, Perlman (2005) 300–8) and Xenophon proclaimed the absolute originality of Spartan laws (David (2007a), 300–1); conversely, Isocrates claims that they derived from Athenian laws (12.152–5).

- 33 For the traditional interpretation of the passage see, for instance, Tigerstedt (1965–1978) I 71; Evans (1991) 24–5; Lévy (2003) 35.
- 34 The Spartan tradition certainly acknowledged, since its origin, a relationship between Delphi and Lykourgos; we need not suppose that Spartans stopped believing in it in Herodotos’ time. For unnecessary suggestions on this troubling topic see Busolt (1920) 42, Ehrenberg (1925), 12, or more recently Thommen (1996) 25–6.
- 35 See Diod. 7.12.1 with the strong ἔγωγε δώσω (“I myself will give”) and 7.12.6 (Parke and Wormell (1956) II nos. 216 and 21), and of course the “Great” *Rhētra*, if included among the texts published by Pausanias.
- 36 Polyb. 10.2.8–11 emphasizes the care with which Lykourgos systematically added the Delphic oracles to his own plans (but he does not speak of their Cretan origin because he emphasizes the differences between Crete and Sparta: 6.45–6). Some authors argue for Cretan origin of the laws: Arist. *Pol.* 2.1271b 24–30. (cf. 2.1274a29), [Pl.] *Minos* 318c–d, but in the case of Aristotle, for example, knowledge of Ephoros’ version is very likely (see Nafissi (1983–1984) 358–63); Aristotle mentions among other things Lykourgos’ interaction with Thales, who introduced Lykourgos to the “tricks” of Minos and Rhadamanthys.
- 37 Busolt (1893–1904) 515–16, 565–6, Tigerstedt (1965–1978) I 71, 212, cf. Vannicelli (1993) 47 n. 58, Cuniberti (2000), 104, David (2007b) 122.

- 38 See Kōiv (2005) 248–9 n. 89. A more precise view depends in turn on the view one takes of Diodorus' extended version (7.12.1, Parke and Wormell (1956) II no. 216) of the oracle in Herodotos (1.65.3, Parke and Wormell (1956) II no. 29). After the four lines cited there ("You have come to my rich temple, O Lykourgos, dear to Zeus and to all who dwell in the halls of Olympos. I am in doubt whether I will declare that you are a god or a man, but I rather expect to declare you a god, O Lykourgos," trans. H.W. Parke) – in which many note the lack of message: Fontenrose (1978) 116 – Diodorus proposes two others, which attest the belief that it was the Pythia who gave laws to Sparta ("And you have come asking for a good constitution. Indeed I myself will give you one which no other city on earth will possess," trans. H.W. Parke). Herodotos connects the visit to Delphi with *eunomia*, and after quoting the oracle he explains: "Some say that in addition to these words, the Pythia also gave instructions for the institutions that now exist in Sparta" (1.65.4). Either Herodotos has omitted the last two verses, or they are a later addition (thus Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1884) 274; Niese (1907a) 442 n. 2; Ehrenberg (1925) 12; Jacoby *FGrH* 582, *Noten* 362.3; Hammond (1950) 58 n. 86; Parke and Wormell (1956) I 85–7, Fontenrose (1978) 116, Vannicelli (1993) 47). Curiously, in that case the former alternative is rarely envisaged, while a similar solution has been widely accepted for Tyrt. fr. 1^b G.-P. ap. Plut. *Lyk.* 6.10; in that case four more verses transmitted by Diodorus 7.12.6 = Tyrt. fr. °14 G.-P., are united with the ones transmitted by Plutarch (Tyrt. fr. 4 W.; Nafissi (2010) 99 n. 49).
- 39 It is likely that this tradition is more ancient than that which emphasizes the link with Crete: Niese (1907a) 442–4. Certainly there is no reason to think that the former version originated in Delphi (Jacoby (1913) 421, Tigerstedt (1965–1978) I, 71, 377 n. 551, David (2007b), 116) cf. Giangiulio (2010).
- 40 We do not know whether the anonymous version reported by Herodotos was vague on the chronology of Lykourgos: cf. Thomas (2001) 201–2.
- 41 Christesen 2007, 60–73, 85–8, 146–57 supposes that Hippias of Elis, who at the end of the fifth century or at the beginning of the fourth century produced the first complete list of Olympic victors, was already acquainted with the disk. Christesen dates the disk to the sixth century. His further assumption that the synchronism with Lykourgos was decisive for fixing the beginning of the Olympics at 776 BC cannot be supported by our evidence.
- 42 Fr. 628 Page = Plut. *Lyk.* 1.8, schol. Pl. *Rep.* 10.599d: the nod to Lykourgos' tutelage in the latter passage could be supposed to be the result of contamination from other sources.

- 43 Meyer (1892a) 277, Busolt (1893–1904) I 571, Beloch (1912–1927) I² 2, 255–6, Tigerstedt (1965–1978) I 71, Bringmann (1999) 73, David (2007b) 122. For emphasis on the chronological aspect, see Kahrstedt (1927) 2442–3, Manfredini–Piccirilli (1980) xv; Paradiso (2000) 373 n. 2.
- 44 This genealogy makes Eunomos the father of Charilaos, as Simonides wanted (less important is that, for Herodotos, Eunomos was the son of Polydektes, not of Prytanis): the subsequent common version instead has the sequence Prytanis, Eunomos, Polydektes, Charilaos. Two distinct phases of the tradition, and a Eunomos originally distinct from Lykourgos, are postulated by Meyer (1892a) 276; Niese (1907b), col. 1133; Beloch (1912) I² 2, 255, cf. Kōiv (2005) 247. The mention of *Eunomia* in Alcman fr. Page 64 does not change the substance of the problem. The violent death of Eunomos, killed while trying to settle a dispute (Plut. *Lyk.* 2.6), is better suited to Eunomos as the brother of Lykourgos (who has to die prematurely) than to his father. Poralla (Poralla and Bradford (1985) 150 f.), Huxley (1962) 42 (cf. 20) apparently conceived of a Eunomos included in the royal lists in relation to Lykourgos.
- 45 Busolt (1893–1904) I 573, Bringmann (1999) 73, Christien and Ruzé (2007) 50.
- 46 The Spartans were remembered for knowing well how *archein kai archesthai*: cf. Powell (1994) 274 with references. But not every Spartan possessed this virtue. Theras is not an isolated case: it is not accidental that the *staseis* (civil conflicts) recounted by Aristotle center on *timē* “honor” (*Pol.* 5.1306b27–1307a5). Xenophon closes his otherwise laudatory portrait of Clearchos, a very unruly Spartan, as follows: “such he was as a commander (*archōn*), but being commanded (*archesthai*) by others was not especially to his liking, so people said” (*Anab.* 2.6.1–15, trans. C.L. Brownson). At the beginning of the fifth century, Sparta was threatened by the activities of Demaratos, a king who lost his *basileia* and who was willing to join Xerxes to retrieve it. We are accustomed to think of Demaratos as “wise counselor,” but certainly in Sparta he was viewed with consternation. Herodotos (6.67) narrates an event which supposedly led Demaratos to abandon the city. During a festival, Leotychidas, the new *basileus*, offended Demaratos (at the time elected to some office) by sending “his servant to ask Demaratos by way of mere mockery and insult how he liked his office (*archein*) after being a king (*basileuein*).”
- 47 Szegedy-Maszak (1978) 207; McGlew (1993) 107–9; Hölkeskamp (1999) 51–3.
- 48 Nafissi (2004), esp. 86–7. On the regents in Sparta and on kings and regents as a source of city *stasis*, see generally Carlier (1984) 243–4 n. 50, 287–91.

- 49 Simonides wrote poems of various kinds for Sparta or about Sparta at the time of the Persian wars: famous epigrams (as XXIIb Page: “Go, tell the Spartans, passerby ...”), the lyric poem for the dead at Thermopylai (fr. 531 Page: “Of those who fell at Thermopylai ...”) and probably the great elegy for Plataia discovered in the late twentieth century (fr. 3–4 G.-P.² auct. = 10–17 W.²). In this latter composition Simonides identifies Pausanias as *aristos* (“excellent, best”: fr. 3b.39–40 G.-P.² auct. = 11.34–5 W.²). Nobili 2012, 171 now shows that the fragment on Lykourgos belongs to a poem by Simonides, of which we possess two other fragments.
- 50 The meaning of “*kratistoi* in the *polis*” is somewhat obscure, because Xenophon does not clarify the circumstances of the reform in question: if Lykourgos was not the regent, the term should at least include the kings (cf. Gray (2007) 166).
- 51 Note that the wordplay, by the more authoritarian colleague Archelaos, on Charilaos’ name and mild nature repeats the distinction between weak and populist vs. authoritarian kings, assigning to each co-king an attitude suitable to his name: Charilaos “he who seeks favour with the people” vs. Archelaos “he who leads the people” (Lyk. 2.4–5).
- 52 Piccirilli (1981). See also Plut. *Comp. Lyc. et Numae* 1.8; *Sol.* 16.2; *Mor.* 227a–b; Val. Max. 5.3 *ext.* 2; Muson. F 39 Hense = Epict. F 5 Schenkl; Paus. 3.18.2; Aelian *VH* 13.23; Orig. *C. Cels.* 8.35; Themist. *Or.* 7.97 b–c; Olympiod. in *Plat. Gorg.* 44.2. Attempts to show an Ephoran origin are not compelling.
- 53 Hodkinson (2000) 37–60 offers a very useful introduction to this topic. Tigerstedt (1965–1978) II 76–86 is always worth reading. On *Instituta Laconica* see Ducat (2006) 29–32.
- 54 Tellingly, when Plutarch tries to emphasize Lykourgos’ employment of force, the best evidence he can adduce is the fact that he lost his eye (*Sol.* 16.2).
- 55 Plut. *Agis* 3.8, Paus. 3.6.6–7; Tigerstedt (1965–1978) II 77.
- 56 Among the rich literature on Spartan women see Cartledge (1981), Figueira (2010). A collection of essays by E. Millender (ed.), *Unveiling Spartan Women*, is forthcoming.
- 57 Lévy (1988); Ducat (1997a); Ducat (1997b); Ducat (2006) 281–331; Link (2006). Modern scholars would be mistaken to be guided by Plutarch’s eulogistic purpose.
- 58 Schütrumpf (1987), Hodkinson (2000) 91–3, Todd (2005), Nafissi (2008) 72–84. Lupi (2003) 161–1, Figueira (2004), 50 f., Avramović (2005)

defend the historicity of Epitadeus' *rhētra*.

- 59 Hermippus *FGrH* 1026 F 6 cf. Plut. *Mor.* 227f–228a; Justin. 3.3.8: cf. Hodkinson (2000) 98 f.
- 60 Plut. *Agis* 10.2–4, *Kleom.* 18.2, *Mor.* 226b–d.
- 61 Plut. *Lyk.* 8.5, 16.1; Hodkinson (2000), 43–5.
- 62 Hodkinson's reconstruction has been criticized by Figueira (2004), 48–53.
- 63 Isocr. *Archid.* 20, Plato *Laws* 3.684d–e cf. 5.736c–e.
- 64 The oracle delivered to Lykourgos in Diod. 7.12.6 (Tyrt. 14 G.-P.) plainly derives from an oracle that Tyrtaios thought had been delivered to Theopompos and Polydoros: Tyrt. fr. 1^b G.-P. *ap.* Plut. *Lyk.* 6.10; Nafissi (2010) 96–102.

CHAPTER 5

Laconian Pottery

Maria Pipili

Archaeological investigation in Laconian territory, particularly in the major Spartan shrines, has brought to light many types of locally made artefact which contrast strongly with the literary image of an austere Sparta hostile to the arts (cf. Plutarch, *Lyk.* 9) and also reveal a city which was for a certain period particularly open to the outside world. Of special interest among these artefacts, because of its long and unbroken sequence, and by far the most common, is painted pottery which appears to have been manufactured locally from the tenth century BC onwards, reaching its finest moment in the sixth century with the widely exported black-figured and black-glazed ware.

5.1 The Protogeometric and Geometric Styles

The history of Laconian pottery starts around 950–900 BC with the appearance of a Protogeometric style which lasted until the first quarter of the eighth century BC. This characteristic local fabric, which shows little or no relation to the preceding Mycenaean, has some links with the Protogeometric of Western Greece, and is thus suggestive of an inflow of Dorian newcomers into Laconia from the north-west sometime during the tenth century BC (Cartledge 1979, 82–92; more cautious in using this fabric as evidence for discontinuity in Laconia, Coulson 1985, 63–5). The style has no obvious connection to contemporary Attic or Argive models, an indication that Laconia was geographically isolated for more than a century. Most of the ceramic material comes from the sanctuary of Apollo at Amyklai, a few kilometres south of Sparta, and secondarily from Sparta itself – the sanctuary of Athena on the Acropolis and the sanctuary of Orthia, later identified with Artemis, on the western bank of the Eurotas. It consists of sherds belonging mostly to open vessels – deep-bellied, carinated or flaring skyphoi, cups, bowls and kraters – which show a strong liking for cross-hatching, especially cross-hatched triangles in square metopal panels, and a sharp articulation marked by horizontal grooving.

After a short transitional stage, a Geometric style which has the characteristics of Late Geometric was established in Laconia shortly before 750 BC and lasted for about a century. Unlike the previous Protogeometric, the new style is much indebted to the workshops of Argos and Corinth, and is more widely

distributed within Laconia than before. It has also been found in Taras, Sparta's colony, founded in South Italy at the end of the eighth century BC. The two favourite large shapes are the krater and the tall pyxis, and, in a small scale, the skyphos, the plate, the small bowl and the lakaina, a type of cup with a very tall straight lip leaning slightly outwards which was to become very popular in Laconia. White slip is often used on the smaller thin-walled vessels. The main decorative motifs – leaf-shaped lozenges, hatched zigzags and step meanders – are taken from Argos. Corinthian influence, which is stronger in the latest, Subgeometric, phase, is detected in the single narrow motifs (double zigzags, floating sigmas, files of silhouette birds) decorating the main field of skyphoi and lakainai. The figured scenes tentatively introduced in Laconian Geometric are dancing and horses, the two favourite subjects of the Argive school.

5.2 Laconian I: The Age of Experiment

Around 650 BC a short-lived orientalizing style which lasted until 620 BC succeeded the Late Geometric one. It is known as Laconian I in the terminology proposed by the early British excavators of the shrine of Artemis Orthia, who classified Laconian pottery according to the stratigraphy of the site. This is a period of experimentation and of a new creative spirit for Laconian pottery. The ceramic production is divided into a finer and a rougher class which are contemporary. The finer vases are small open shapes – footless cups, chalices, lakainai, bowls and plates – well shaped, with extremely thin walls, perhaps imitating metalwork, and with a high quality paint and white slip which is now regularly used. The decoration is simple and to a large extent still Geometric in character. A characteristic ornament introduced in this period and continued in the next is the band of black squares between two rows of dots which often runs round the slipped lip of cups, skyphoi and lakainai. This decorative pattern has been regarded as a development of the dot rows along the lip of Geometric vases (Lane 1933–34, 117), and has also been compared to the dividing bands on East Greek vases of the later seventh century BC (Boardman 1963, 2–3). A more obvious East Greek influence on Laconian pottery during this period are some local imitations of the popular East Greek bird bowls. Animal friezes inspired by Protocorinthian are slowly introduced, while human figures are still very rare. The figures are in silhouette and outline combined. The fabric is very common in all Spartan shrines where the only other regional school represented is Protocorinthian. It has been suggested that the fine Laconian I style was created by a single craftsman (Lane 1933–34, 116), perhaps an immigrant in Laconia (F. Carocci in Pompili 1986, 174). Fragments of what has been regarded as the earliest Laconian volute-krater, found at the Samos Heraion,

belong to the end of this period, the years around 625 BC (Stibbe 1997, 49–52, pl. 1, 1–4). The volute-krater would later be a characteristic Laconian shape, particularly in its metal version.

5.3 Laconian II: The Introduction of Black-Figure

The creative impulse which characterizes Laconian I continues even stronger in the following period which sees the introduction of the black-figure technique under Corinthian influence, together with a large-scale export of Laconian vases. During its first experimental stage known as Laconian II (620–580/70 BC) there is limited use of incision, the figures being mainly in silhouette and outline. As in Laconian I, the finest vases are mostly small: cups, *lakainai*, chalices, cylindrical mugs, small goblets with flaring walls, plates and bowls. These are thin-walled and elegant in shape, and their decoration is simple and mainly abstract. Vegetal ornament does not play an important role yet. The band of squares between two rows of dots is still a common decorative pattern for lips, with the black squares more widely spaced than in the previous period when black and white squares were equal in size. There are few human figures and the animals are taken from Corinthian. Particularly popular are the cups, which are either small with a shallow ring-foot, or larger with a low conical foot and a low convex rim. These two types of cup, introduced in the late seventh century, probably ran parallel during the first quarter of the sixth, but the second variety had a longer life, perhaps until 570 BC. Laconian II cups with a conical foot are very close in shape to the Ionian cups and they may also have the narrow reserved band in the handle zone which is typical of those cups. Some others carry a row of silhouette water birds with drooping purple tails, usually looking back, in the handle zone.

Three nice examples, dated around 590–570 BC, were found in a grave in Taras, the Laconian colony in South Italy (Pelagatti 1955–56, 12, fig. 3). They are all by one painter, known as the ‘Painter of the Fish of Taranto’ after the interior decoration of two of them. The more elaborate of the two, with a row of dolphins swimming around a group of tuna fish which surround a central rosette (op. cit. 13, figs. 4–5), has been described as the finest of all Laconian vases. Laconian II cups with a conical foot had a wide distribution; they have been found mainly in the East (Samos, Miletos), South Italy (Taras), Sicily (where their predominantly votive use has been noted: Pelagatti 1990, 126) and Etruria, all good markets for the developed Laconian black-figure of the following period. Apart from the cup with a low conical foot, another Laconian II shape which shows eastern influences is the ‘fruit-dish’, a shallow bowl on a high stem. This type of vase was not exported, however, but was used mainly for dedication at the Spartan shrines. Along with the smaller

shapes, fragments of some important volute-kraters which date from the first quarter of the sixth century BC have recently come to light in Samos and Miletos (according to Schaus (2015), some kraters are by the Painter of the Fish of Taranto whom he regards as an important pioneer in the creation of Laconian black-figure).

5.4 The Developed Laconian Black-Figure Style

Around 580 BC a full black-figure with incision was established and lasted until the end of the sixth century BC. The style was known as Laconian III and IV in the old classification. The latter is no longer used for this period which is now understood rather as the styles of individual painters and the development of shapes. This is the heyday of Laconian figured pottery which is now widely, if mostly thinly, exported throughout the Mediterranean and often imitated. The pottery was originally thought to be Cyrenean because of the famous image of king Arkesilas of Cyrene supervising the weighing and storing of a substance which might be silphion (the medical plant of Cyrene) or wool on the interior of one such cup found at Vulci (Paris, Cabinet des Médailles 189; Stibbe 1972, no. 194, pl. 61, 2). It was only after British excavations in Sparta at the beginning of the last century had brought to light many vases in this style, and also confirmed that their clay and slip were the same as used in Laconia since Geometric times, that the true origin of this production was revealed. Laconian black-figure owes much to Corinth for technique and subject matter, and was also influenced by East Greek and, after the mid-sixth century, by Attic. It is, however, a very individual style characterized by a simple and lively figured decoration, a rich floral ornamentation and a vivid polychromy due to the added purple and to the contrast created by the frequent use of a pale cream slip as a background for the decoration. This is a provincial school of pottery, yet some potters and painters were very competent, and there is much which is new and original in shape, composition and narrative.

With 716 vases with figured decoration known to date (lists in Stibbe 1972, 269-90; Stibbe 2004, 201-51; cf. Pipili 2006, 75, n. 3) Laconian black-figure is a small production issued from a few workshops – some modern scholars have plausibly suggested that there were just two workshops which later merged into one (F. Pompili in Pompili 1986, 7-10; against this view, Stibbe 2004, 6) – and did not last for more than two generations. The close similarities in vase shape, style of drawing and treatment of subject seem to suggest a family enterprise as was often the case, for instance, in the Athenian Kerameikos, as confirmed by craftsmen's signatures on vases. We also know

(Herodotos 6.60) that some professions in Sparta, such as that of the herald, cook-sacrificer or flute player, were hereditary among some families, and it could well have been the same with potters and painters. Attribution to individual artistic hands has often been a matter of controversy owing to the stylistic affinities in this fabric. Six major painters were first recognized (Lane 1933–34), their number later reduced to three (Shefton 1954) and then again augmented to five in the most authoritative study on the subject (Stibbe 1972). Four of these painters use inscriptions on a small number of vases and thus appear to have been literate. Thirteen minor painters have also been identified (Stibbe 1972, 177–93; Stibbe 2004, 87–149) but the attributions have not been unanimously accepted (see, e.g., F. Pompili in Pompili 1986, 53–64; Shefton 1989, 70–1, n. 80) and there is certainly room for more research on the subject. Correlation of shape and style has led to the assumption that potter and painter were the same person most of the time (Stibbe 1972, 13), but a cautionary note has been expressed (Hemelrijk 2006), since this has led sometimes to the attribution to a single painter of works which may be very close in shape and secondary ornament but which present marked stylistic differences in their figured decoration.

It is commonly thought that the making of vases, and of Laconian artefacts in general, was in the hands of the *perioikoi* ('dwellers-around'), the free non-Spartiates of Laconia. Lack of systematic investigation of perioikic settlements, however, does not allow us to locate the centre of this ceramic production. The most likely candidate is the lower valley of the Eurotas or the coast near its mouth, around the small town of Helos or at Gytheion where the existence of a good port would facilitate exports. It has also been proposed that the pottery was made mostly in the vicinity of Sparta, 'the main centre of population and consumption in the region' (R. Catling in Cavanagh et al. 1996, 88), which has also provided some evidence for manufacturing activity with the discovery of a potter's kiln (Cartledge 2001, 182; cf. the moulds found in a deposit of clay figurines and plaques: Raftopoulou 1998, 127). That some Spartan citizens practised manual arts (thus, e.g., Huxley 1962, 63; Ridley 1974; Cartledge 1976) is not to be excluded. Finally, it has often been assumed that immigrant craftsmen were active in archaic Laconia (against this view, Cook 1962, 156), and a radical theory tentatively put forward attributes most of the Laconian black-figured production to foreigners who later left, causing the decline of this craft (Catling 2010, 51, n. 18).

Dating Laconian black-figure is difficult owing to lack of stratified deposits apart from those of Artemis Orthia. The fabric is dated mainly through its association with the better dated Corinthian in graves of Taras and Rhodes and in a deposit at Tocra in Libya (Stibbe 1972, 8–9). The Arkesilas cup, the style of which is contemporary with the reign of king Arkesilas II of Cyrene (565–560 BC), has often been taken to provide a good absolute date, but, as has rightly been stated, it supports rather than establishes the chronology

(Shefton 1954, 308). It should also be noted that the figure depicted on it has not been unanimously identified with this king; the earlier Arkesilas I (599–583 BC), who had a longer and happier reign and had become something of a legend, has also been proposed (Simon 1981, 59).

Of the roughly 700 Laconian black-figured vases which can be attributed to a particular painter or workshop known to date, some 600, that is, 85 per cent, are high-stemmed cups, an elegant shape with a rather shallow bowl, a high lip and fine walls (Figure 5.1).



Figure 5.1 Laconian high-stemmed cup. Brussels R401. Attributed to the Arkesilas Painter.

Source: © Royal Museums of Art and History, Brussels.

There is another type of Laconian black-figured cup, the so-called Droop cup, which is heavier, with a thick black rim which curves out and a medium-high stem usually with a grooved top.

The handle zone carries a floral band and the lower part of the bowl is decorated with bands and rays or crescents (Figure 5.2), or sometimes a zone of animals. There are few Droop cups with figured decoration inside, but there are many which have only a simple floral ornament outside or are entirely black-glazed, particularly from Laconia itself, where the high-stemmed cup was never popular. Other black-figured shapes are the *lakaina* known since Geometric times and probably the commonest type of drinking vessel in Laconia during most of the seventh and sixth centuries BC, the *kantharos* and the *aryballos*, all represented by few black-figured examples but very common in a black-glazed version. There are also some fruit dishes, *phialai*, chalices and two-handled mugs. Of the large shapes, we have a few black-figured

volute-kraters, hydriai, amphorae, oinochoai and fragments of dinoi, some of which were probably special commissions. But Laconian black-figure is first and foremost a production of high-stemmed cups, and it is this specialization in a particular shape, which was moreover a novelty in its time, that allowed this small provincial black-figure school to capture many foreign markets and withstand for two generations the pressure of its big antagonists in the field, Corinthian and Attic.



Figure 5.2 Laconian Droop cup, Kassel T 354. Attributed to the Chimaera Painter.

Source: Museumslandschaft Hessen Kassel, Antikensammlung.

Finally, it is remarkable that only 7.7 per cent of the Laconian black-figured vases which have been assigned to a particular painter or workshop come from Laconia (mostly lakainai, oinochoai, dishes, and only very few cups). Most vases from the two big Spartan sanctuaries, of Artemis Orthia and of Athena Chalkioikos on the Acropolis, have a simple floral ornament or are not decorated at all. However this is to be explained – as a matter of local taste, of religious conservatism in the use of votive shapes, of social conditions which suppressed luxury, or by assuming that craftsmen spent most of their time abroad serving their foreign clients – the fact remains that the finest ceramic product ever made in Laconia, the high-stemmed black-figured cup, was not favoured by the Spartans.

5.5 The First Generation of Laconian Black-Figure Potters and Painters

5.5.1 The creation of the high-stemmed Laconian cup

The two earliest Laconian ceramists who worked in full black-figure and were responsible for the creation of the typical high-stemmed Laconian cup were the Naukratis Painter and the Boreads Painter who started their career around 575 BC (the latter possibly as early as 580 BC). The Naukratis Painter, named after a cup from Naukratis in London (Stibbe 1972, no. 23; Pipili 1987, 40, fig. 54), is the most important of the Laconian vase-painters since he experimented with many shapes and decorative motifs, and introduced much of Laconian vase imagery. He worked in both large scale and miniature and was very fond of ornament. Influenced by Corinthian pottery, whence he probably borrowed the black-figure technique, he decorated the lower part of the outside of many of his cups with files of corinthianizing animals and the interior with mythical figures (Gorgoneia, Boreads, a sphinx) which are very similar to the contemporary Corinthian. He might even have been a Corinthian himself (Faustoferri 1986, 139), since his only inscription, on a vase fragment from Cyrene (Schaus 1979; Schaus 1985, 33, no. 153, pl. 9), is in a script used by Corinth (also by Cyrene, which made Schaus, *op. cit.*, suggest a Cyrenean origin for the painter). But the shape of the Naukratis Painter's cups is not related to Corinthian, nor is it an evolution of the earlier Laconian type of cup. After some experiments with a medium-high foot, he introduced the typical high-stemmed cup around 570 BC, at a time when the main Attic cup, the Siana cup, was still a heavy shape like its Corinthian models. The Laconian cup is a new conception of form, which may have been inspired by the local 'fruit-dish', a shallow bowl with high foot popular in Sparta already from the second half of the seventh century, as has plausibly been suggested (Stibbe 2004, 10, 12–14), in which case it would appear that the Naukratis Painter had roots in Laconia. The Laconian fruit dish, on the other hand, was itself probably modelled after stemmed shapes popular in East Greece (dishes and plates), so the initial influence for the stemmed Laconian cup should be sought in the East. It is not without reason that the Laconian cups have been described as a kind of shallow, straight rimmed eastern bowls and phialai to which feet and handles had been added (Boardman 1998, 186).

There is much variety in the way the Naukratis Painter's cups are decorated. The outside of the lip is either plain or decorated with a floral (myrtle leaves or a lotus bud chain) and its interior may also carry an ornament (tongues, a lotus bud chain or pomegranates) on the more elaborate cups. The handle

zone is either plain or decorated with a lotus chain (very rarely with animals) and there are usually horizontal lotus buds or palmettes by the handles. On the lower part of the bowl there is sometimes an animal frieze in the Corinthian manner and there is also some experimentation with a totally black lower part of the bowl after East Greek models. The animal friezes inside and outside and the many ornamental zones seem to be an imitation of the similar decoration of fruit dishes. The horizontal palmettes by the handles and the painted horizontal lines emulating grooves on the upper part of the stem of some cups suggest an influence of the important local metal-vase industry, an influence detected already in the fine small Laconian I and II vases, and very obvious in the moulded attachments on some large sixth-century shapes, hydriai or oinochoai (for metal prototypes in Laconian pottery see Stibbe 2004, 7–8). The Naukratis Painter may also have invented the other Laconian cup shape, the Droop cup (Stibbe 2004, 10; Pipili 2009), which was until recently thought to have been introduced in a later period.

The other early black-figure painter, the Boreads Painter, named after a cup in Rome showing the two Boreads (sons of the North Wind) chasing the Harpies (Stibbe 1972, no. 122, pl. 41, 1) was active until about 565 BC and painted only cups, but is important because he introduced the three ornamental friezes on the lower part of the bowl which were to become the canonical exterior decoration of the Laconian cup: a zone of pomegranates around the junction of the bowl with the stem of the foot, then a zone of tongues and a zone of rays. The division of the tondo into a main part and an exergue was also his creation in imitation of East Greek plates. A pomegranate frieze usually frames the interior image of his cups. It has been suggested that the Boreads Painter originated from East Greece, perhaps from Samos (F. Pompili in Pompili 1986, 69 with n. 18). It is notable that no work by him has been found in Laconia.

Apart from its shape and secondary ornament of the exterior, the Laconian cup differs from the other contemporary cups also in the disposition of decoration. On Corinthian and Attic black-figured cups the main field for narrative was the handle zone on the outside of the bowl, a natural choice since it gave the painters the necessary space to develop their images. The main figure-decorated area of the Laconian cup, on the contrary, is its interior with the image usually filling the whole circle (Figs. 5.4, 5.8, 5.9 and 5.10). The Attic komast cups had no decoration inside, and the Siana cups a small medallion with one or two figures. The tondo of the Laconian cup is usually divided by a groundline into a main part and an exergue, the latter being decorated, for example, with a floral, a fish, or a confronting pair of birds or animals. The interior circular field often carries simple decorative motifs or single emblematic figures which adapt well to it, but was not appropriate for the depiction of narrative. One solution was to subdivide the interior picture into zones and another to place the figures in a frieze running around the

central medallion; symposiasts, comasts, riders, dogs chasing a hare or a fox are shown in this manner, usually around a central floral or a Gorgoneion.

Another painter of the second quarter of the sixth century BC was the Arkesilas Painter. This talented and original craftsman was active in the decade 565–555 BC and may have succeeded the Boreads Painter as head of his workshop. The lesser Rider Painter, named after three cups showing a single rider (Stibbe 1972, nos. 302, 306, 307, pl. 108, 1. 4; the first cup should not be associated with this painter), also started working in the 560s (perhaps as early as 570 BC) but had a longer career which covers part of the third quarter of the sixth century. Both the Arkesilas and the Rider Painter often imitate closely the Naukratis Painter's style of drawing and decorative motifs, and some of their images are probably copies of compositions by the older master.

5.5.2 The Samian Heraion and the East Greek factor

It is not only the shape and manner of decoration of the main Laconian black-figured commodity, the stemmed cup, which has little in common with cups of the other contemporary mainland schools of pottery. The general style of Laconian black-figure of the second quarter of the sixth century, too, is very particular. The profuse filling ornament, especially animals, birds, reptiles which cover the background, the elaborate florals, often sprouting from heads of figures, daemonic or not, and such oddities as the small winged daemons who appear flying around on several vases, give to the images a very distinctive character. It is an orientalizing character in a period when East Greek influence – though often detectable – is not so conspicuous in the other black-figure fabrics. The winged daemons in particular are very unusual and have been the object of much speculation (for the various views see Pipili 1987, 71–6). It seems that it was the Naukratis Painter who introduced them into the Laconian black-figure imagery, since the earliest vases on which they appear are by him, dated around 565–560 BC. They were adopted by other painters, such as the Arkesilas and the Rider Painter, who were influenced by the older master. The winged creatures may surround a standing goddess, as on the Naukratis Painter's name-vase in London, participate in banquets (Figure 5.3) or accompany a young rider (Figure 5.9). Such daemons are unknown in Corinthian art, and in Attic vase-painting they appear as Erotes only at the end of the sixth century. Winged figures of all types were, however, popular in the East from an early period and it is quite obvious that this is where the inspiration for the Naukratis Painter's sprites came from. Compared to other Greek schools of pottery, however, East Greek vase-

painting is poor in figured scenes, and it is thus unlikely that the Laconian painters borrowed elements of their imagery from it. Moreover, the most developed figured style of South Ionia, the Fikellura style now shown by clay analysis to have had a Milesian origin, of which a great amount has come to light in recent excavations at Miletos, starts around 560 BC or even later, thus postdating the Naukratis Painter's earliest works. We should suppose that the various orientalizing motifs introduced by the Naukratis Painter were borrowed from the decoration of other East Greek objects (metalwork, ivories, textiles) or from large-scale paintings which have not survived.



Figure 5.3 Laconian cup fragment. Antikensammlung.Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz 478x. Attributed to the Arkesilas Painter.

Source: © 2016. Photo Scala, Florence/bpk, Bildagentur für Kunst, Kultur und Geschichte, Berlin.

That the black-figure style of Dorian Sparta would be influenced more than any other mainland school of pottery by the East might seem strange at first sight but is not difficult to explain. Sparta was open to the Eastern world from an early period as we know from the numerous orientalizing objects which were dedicated at the Orthia sanctuary, some of them imports from the East, others copies of local manufacture. Laconian pottery, more specifically, shows familiarity with East Greek models from about 650 BC, as indicated by imitations of East Greek bird bowls, the ionicizing Laconian II cups which were widely exported in South Ionia or the stemmed fruit dishes. Craftsmen from the East – the architects Bathykles from Magnesia and Theodoros of Samos – were active in Laconia in the sixth century, the name of a Laconian artisan inscribed on a bronze discus from Olympia betrays an Ionian origin

(Catling 2010) and, as already mentioned, it has been suggested that the Boreads Painter was an immigrant from Ionia.

Particularly close were the relations of Sparta with Samos for which there is ample evidence, both literary and archaeological. Herodotos (3.47.1) tell us that Samos had helped Sparta in one of her wars against Messenia, probably the Second Messenian War in the mid-seventh century, and ties of *xenia*, or what has been called ritualized guest-friendship, have been assumed between Spartan and Samian aristocrats (Cartledge 1982). About one-third of the known Laconian black-figured vases of the second quarter of the sixth century come from the Samian Heraion where other Laconian artefacts (ivories, bronzes or works in stone) have also been found (lists in Stibbe 1997, 32–3). It seems that the Laconian black-figured vases, with their refined form and original decoration, were favoured by the Samian aristocracy which held power until the rise of Polykrates and had probably a central role in the sanctuary of Hera. The Laconian ceramists may even have produced special vases for this dominant Samian elite, since fragments of what must once have been splendid kraters, dinoi and their stands by the Naukratis Painter have been found only at the Heraion. Also, some cups from Samos are decorated with special themes which suggest that these were made to order (for special commissions at the Heraion, see Pipili 2000). A very interesting case is a fragmentary cup by the Arkesilas Painter (fragments in Samos and Berlin: Stibbe 1972, no. 191, pls. 58–9) (Figure 5.3) which shows an open air feast (a building and a tree are visible) where the banqueters and the flute girls who accompany them recline on the ground, as was common in the East, and one woman wears an oriental headdress, the *mitra*, in a probable attempt of the painter to reproduce life on Samos (this suggestion, first made by Carter 1989, seems more likely than the view that the vase might reflect eastern influence within Sparta itself, for which cf. Alkman fr. 1, 67–8 where reference is made to the ‘Lydian mitra’ worn by Spartan girls [for this view see Pipili 1987, 74 with bibliography]).

The close contact of the early-black-figure Laconian ceramists with Samos and South Ionia more generally, since recent excavations at Miletos have shown that this was another centre which received a lot of Laconian, is probably the determining factor for the strongly orientalizing special character of Laconian black-figure. Furthermore, there is good reason to believe that the impetus given to the Laconian potters and painters by the rich Ionian clientele made an important contribution to the flowering of Laconian black-figure in the second quarter of the sixth century BC.

5.5.3 Imitations of Laconian black-figure

The great success that the Laconian stemmed cups of the second quarter of the

sixth century BC had in East Greece is the reason for the appearance of several East Greek copies of Laconian ornament and figured work (Shefton 1989; cf. Stibbe 1994a, 80–2). There are Samian Little Master cups which copy the ornamental bands (lotus and pomegranate chains) of Laconian, particularly those of the Boreads Painter. Also, a Milesian (Fikellura) cup from Samos has all around its tondo a row of winged daemons that are very similar to those of the Naukratis Painter, and there are more small winged creatures on Milesian vases excavated in recent years at Miletos. This type of daemon was probably an original creation (under eastern influence) of the Naukratis Painter which was imitated in turn by his Milesian colleagues who worked in a slightly later period. Both Samian and Milesian ceramists were certainly familiar with Laconian pottery which was much imported into their cities.

A rare special shape of which many examples were found at an Artemis sanctuary of Samos (see below [section 5.6.2](#)) is the chalice. Similar Samian vessels have been regarded as imitations of Laconian (Lane 1933–34, 146; Stibbe 1994a, 55).

A Chian group of black-figure from a single workshop dated c.560 BC is connected to Laconian both in shape and decoration, especially in the exterior decoration of cups and in the pomegranates bordering the tondo (see in particular the fragment Williams 2006, 130, fig. 14). Also, a small winged-footed figure flying over a siren on a Chian chalice fragment (op. cit. 131, fig. 20) seems to copy the Laconian sprites. Since no Laconian has been found on Chios, it has been suggested that the acquaintance of the Chian craftsman with the fabric might have been made at Naukratis where all but one of this painter's works have been found and where Laconian was imported at the time, and the hypothesis made that the Chian vases were actually produced in Naukratis (Boardman 1998, 145). Another suggestion is that the Chian vases were the work of a Laconian potter-painter who had migrated to Chios (Williams 2006, 131).

Laconian influence may also be detected on Attic pottery, although the predominantly athenocentric scholarship is rather reluctant to admit it. The Athenian lip-cup which appeared in the late 560s may well have derived from the high-stemmed Laconian cup which had been introduced around 570 BC and was very successful in the markets. This was a time when Athenian potters experimented with various forms and would not hesitate to adopt successful ideas from anywhere. It has also been suggested that the Naukratis Painter's miniature work and his experimentation with a totally black lower part of the bowl may have served as a model for the Athenian Little Master cups (Stibbe 2004, 14, 153). The other Laconian type of cup, the Droop cup, was until recently thought to have been created around 550 BC, at the same time as its Attic counterpart, and views were divided as to which was the prototype and which the derivative. There is now some evidence that the

Laconian Droop cup was created earlier, in the second quarter of the sixth century BC (Stibbe 2004, 10; Pipili 2009), in which case it would be the prototype for the Attic cup.

5.6 The Second Half of the Sixth Century BC

5.6.1 Attic influence versus traditionalism

In the third quarter of the sixth century the high quality of the great masters of the second quarter, the Naukratis Painter, the Boreads Painter and the Arkesilas Painter, is sustained by the Hunt Painter named after two cups showing a boar hunt, one in Paris (Stibbe 1972, no. 220, pl. 78, 1) and the other in Leipzig and Florence (Stibbe 1972, no. 225, pl. 79, 3.5). Both hunts are ‘porthole’ compositions, that is, the images are cut by the frame of the picture and are thus seen as through a porthole. The painter might be copying a rectangular composition making no attempt to adjust his picture to the circular field of the cup. This unusual arrangement is often regarded as characteristic of Laconian vase-painting as a whole, but was in fact used only by the Hunt Painter in a particular period of his career ([Figure 5.4](#)) and more rarely by one of his pupils. The Hunt Painter is a very fine craftsman who started working in the 550s probably next to the Arkesilas Painter whose style he at first imitates closely. Like the Arkesilas Painter, he was also influenced by the major vase-painter of the second quarter of the sixth century, the Naukratis Painter, with whom he shares an ability to work both in large scale and in miniature.



Figure 5.4 Laconian cup. Antikensammlung.Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz 3404. Attributed to the Hunt Painter.

Source: Photo Johannes Laurentius. © 2016. Photo Scala, Florence/bpk, Bildagentur für Kunst, Kultur und Geschichte, Berlin.

The Hunt Painter had a very long career which may have reached the decade 530–520 BC. In his earliest works he shows the typical Laconian liking for filling ornament, but he soon adopts a less ornate style. The decoration of the outside of his cups is also simpler than that of the earlier cups. On the lower part of the exterior the pomegranates and tongues are replaced by blobs and dots and soon the ornamental zones are abandoned altogether in favour of a single band of long rays. Most of his cups after the mid-century are small with a plain lip and handle zone (apart from the horizontal palmettes by the handle, often rendered in silhouette). Like most painters of the second half of the sixth century, the Hunt Painter also decorated Droop cups, the second type of Laconian black-figured cup.

From the 540s onwards, with Attic competition growing, many Laconian vases issued particularly from the Hunt Painter's workshop begin to imitate Athenian pots. The white slip is often omitted and a reddish wash which emulates the redder Attic clay is used instead. The large Laconian tondo is now often smaller like the tondos of Attic Siana cups or Little Master cups (Figure 5.5), and may even be surrounded by a band of tongues in which case the Attic influence is particularly obvious.



Figure 5.5 Laconian cup. Taranto 52847. Attributed to the Hunt Painter.

Source: The Art Archive / Museo Nazionale Taranto / Gianni Dagli Orti.

The lower part of the bowl of some Droop cups does not have the typical Laconian decorative bands, but is painted black, like the Attic band-cups. There are even two rare examples of Laconian Droop cups with a figured scene in the handle zone, again like Attic band-cups. Some other cups from the Hunt Painter's workshop, however, display archaizing elements (decoration of the inside and outside of the lip, zones of animals on the lower part of the bowl, and sometimes – very unusually – in the handle zone, too), probably in the painters' effort to produce very ornate cups which would recall the earlier and highly successful Laconian cups. In fact, what characterizes Laconian vase-painting of the third quarter of the sixth century is this double tendency: on one hand imitation of Attic, and on the other a return to the old recipes of the golden age of Laconian black-figure, the second quarter of the sixth century.

The other painter who started working in the 560s and continued into the third quarter of the century, the Rider Painter, was neither a talented nor an inventive craftsman. His only contribution to the history of Laconian black-figure is his faithful copying of works of the earlier Naukratis Painter. Many of his works have been found intact in Etruscan graves and thus help us reconstruct the Naukratis Painter's oeuvre, a large part of which consists only of sherds found at the Heraion of Samos.

Most minor painters after the middle of the sixth century are influenced more or less by the Hunt Painter or continue working in the earlier Naukratis Painter's style. The progressive mixture of the two styles resulted in what has been called a 'stylistic *koine*', and it is very probable that the Naukratis Painter's workshop merged with that of the Hunt Painter who was the dominant personality in Laconian black-figure at the time (F. Pompili in Pompili 1986, 72–4). A large part of the ceramic production now consists of mechanical copies of earlier compositions and decorative patterns in a style which ranges from average to very bad. Black-figure of high quality was, nevertheless, also produced during this period. A group of miniaturists who painted in a style very close to that of the Hunt Painter at the end of the third quarter of the sixth century produced some very fine work for a sanctuary of Artemis on Samos (see below [section 5.6.2](#)). The Chimaira Painter, named after a cup in Heidelberg with an impressive Chimaira on its interior (Stibbe 1972, no. 352, pl. 128, 1), was active c.530–510 BC, decorated only Droop cups and kept to the traditional Laconian scheme: a large tondo inside, good white slip, and an exterior decoration with animals on the lower part of the bowl. Two other fine painters of the same period, by whom we have only a few works, mainly from Olympia, are the Olympia Painter and the Cyrene Painter. They are both strongly atticizing and for the former it has been suggested that he was an Athenian immigrant in Laconia (Stibbe 1994a, 75), or a Laconian who had learned his craft in Athens (Kunze-Goette 2000, 62).

5.6.2 Laconian black-figure from a votive deposit on Samos

In recent years a votive deposit of a sanctuary of Artemis has been discovered situated just outside the western walls of the ancient city of Samos (Tsakos 1980) and this contained among others a good number of Laconian black-figure – mostly chalices and cups in a fine miniature style – dating from the third quarter of the sixth century BC, particularly the years 535–525 BC (Pipili 2001). The find is important in many ways. First, it shows that Laconian vases did not cease being imported in quantities into Samos after the middle of the sixth century BC as the evidence from the Samian Heraion had seemed to suggest. The percentage of Laconian black-figure from the Heraion in the third quarter of the sixth century is indeed much lower than that in the second quarter (7 per cent as compared to 28 per cent), a decrease which does not occur in any other of the sites which imported Laconian in some quantity apart from Naukratis. This fact led to the hypothesis that around the middle of the sixth century there had been a crisis in the commercial relations between Sparta and Samos, perhaps after the seizure of power by the tyrant Polykrates who overthrew the aristocratic government of the *geōmoroi* ('landsharers') who had friendly relations with the Spartans (Stibbe 1997, 46–7) or after

some Samian acts of piracy against Sparta mentioned by Herodotos (Nafissi 1989, 73–4). The new find shows, however, that the import of Laconian vases into Samos was not interrupted at about the mid-sixth century. The vases were simply directed to another sanctuary and not so much to the Heraion. The fact is not easy to account for but may be associated with the political situation on the island and the probable changes at the Heraion. If the elaborately decorated and presumably expensive Laconian vases of the years 575–550 BC had been favoured, as seems likely, by the aristocratic elite which dominated the Heraion, some of them being special commissions, the seizure of power by Polykrates who suppressed this aristocracy may have affected the demand for them. The traditional date for the rise of Polykrates is 538 BC but it has also been suggested that he was already tyrant in 546 BC (Shipley 1987, 78; cf. Huxley 1962, 74).

Another significance of the new find is that it contained fragments of some exceptional cups with tondos subdivided into horizontal segments decorated with very fine miniature scenes, such as have not been found elsewhere, as well as some hitherto rare or unrecorded shapes. The chalice, a cylindrical vessel with no handles and a high foot, known only from one example from the nearby Samian necropolis, had apparently a ritual use and was decorated appropriately with religious processions. The long horizontal friezes which are not interrupted by handles allowed the painters to develop such themes. Some chalice fragments from the deposit are by the Naukratis Painter who appears thus to have introduced the shape in the second quarter of the sixth century. A type of vase from the deposit, not known until now in Laconian black-figure, is the two-handled cylindrical mug. The decoration consists of animal friezes framed by purple and glaze bands in a mediocre style of drawing.

5.6.3 The decline of Laconian black-figure and the problem of austerity

The last quarter of the sixth century BC sees the decay of Laconian black-figure. Most vases are now destined for the local market, and a large amount comes from a votive deposit of a shrine of Zeus-Agamemnon and Alexandra-Kassandra at Amyklai (Stibbe 1972, pl. 132, 6–7; Stibbe 1994b, 75–85, figs. 1–25). The style, which continues into the fifth century BC, is degenerate, but is interesting because it reveals aspects of local religious practices and beliefs. Few sites outside Laconia have yielded late Laconian black-figure: Taras and Cyrene which had kinship ties with Sparta, and Olympia which was not very far away. It has been suggested that Laconian ceramists may have settled in these areas after the collapse of the workshops at home.

It has often been maintained that the decline of Laconian black-figure in the

late sixth century, viewed in association with the simultaneous end of the local bronze vessel production, was the result of the introduction of an austere way of life. The view of the early excavators of Artemis Orthia that austerity was probably imposed by the ephor Chilon in the mid-sixth century is hardly tenable, and the process of decline has been linked instead to a progressive development of a military society in Sparta (Holladay 1977; Cartledge 1979; Cartledge 2001, 169–84). According to another approach, the cause for the decline of arts in Laconia was not political or social but artistic and commercial (Cook 1962; Hodkinson 1998b). It has been noted that the black-figured vases were found mainly abroad and thus their production could not have been affected by a potentially indifferent minority local clientele. Moreover, the very existence of an austere Sparta has been questioned since, as has been noticed, the various types of artefact did not decline at the same time and bronze votives at Spartan sanctuaries continue down to the mid-fifth century and beyond (Hodkinson 1997; 1998a; 2000, 271 ff.). In fact, as has been shown, those products which were directed to the Spartans themselves, like bronze statuettes, declined later than those much exported. On this approach the decline of Laconian black-figure and its disappearance in the export markets was due solely to a drop in quality because of Attic competition. Another economic theory attributes the decline of arts and crafts in Laconia to the rupture of Sparta's eastern trade after the Persian conquest of Asia Minor around 550 BC (Stubbs 1950; Huxley 1962, 73–4).

The existing evidence seems to support the view that the rise and fall of Laconian black-figure is a story which should not be associated with potential social changes in Sparta itself. First, as has rightly been maintained, the main consumers of this pottery (and most probably its producers, too) were not Spartan citizens. Then, we should note that Laconian black-figure was from the start a small enterprise which depended very much on the talent and inventive spirit of a few potters and painters and on the patronage of two main aristocracies, the Samian and the Etruscan. The very important vase-painters of the second quarter of the sixth century ceased production around the middle of the century, at the same time that the Samian aristocrats lost their power and their dominant position at the Heraion, and these two facts certainly affected the quality of this ceramic production. Nevertheless, there were still competent craftsmen who kept producing very good work in the third quarter of the sixth century, even to its very end, as, for instance, the miniaturists from the Artemis sanctuary on Samos. The rise of Attic, however, and the introduction of red-figure around 530 BC with which the Laconian craftsmen could not compete, led to the loss of many of Laconia's markets and more importantly the Etruscan. Also, trade with South Ionia was presumably interrupted after Sparta's failed attempt to overthrow Polykrates and restore her friendly aristocrats to power around 525 BC, and after the turbulent events that followed the death of Polykrates some years later ending with the total destruction of Samos by the Persians. The loss of their Etruscan and Ionian

clients must have impoverished Laconian potters and painters, and brought their craft, which had already passed its prime, to its final decline.

5.7 The Diffusion and Function of Laconian Black-Figure

The quantity and quality of the Laconian black-figured vases found in the sanctuary of Hera on Samos, together with the special vases made for the Artemis sanctuary on the same island, suggest that these vases were not bought by chance by merchants, Samian or other, who approached the coasts of Laconia.

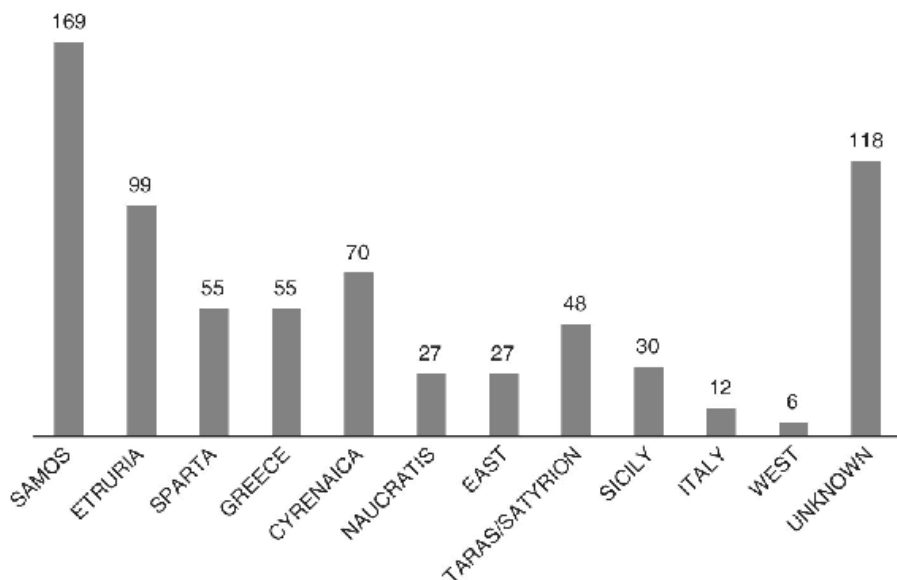


Figure 5.6 Chart of distribution of attributed Laconian black-figured vases.

Source: Author.

We should suppose that there was a regular commercial activity between Sparta and Samos, and South Ionia more generally, since Miletos also appears to have imported a good number of Laconian black-figure in the same period (for a selection see Pfisterer-Haas 1999). For the vases from Miletos which were found mainly at the Aphrodite sanctuary at Zeytintepe, we have to wait for the final publication (in preparation by G. Schaus) to see if they are of the same high quality as those from the Samian Heraion and if they reflect the same close connection between potter and client as observed on Samos. It is also very possible that some of the Laconian vases were made on Samos itself by travelling craftsmen (Stibbe 1997, 35–6, 42–3; Pipili 2001, 99), perhaps with imported clay. We know that sculptors moved a lot to serve clients,

sometimes far away from their home, and it is very likely that this was also the case with potters and painters who probably found it gainful to work in the vicinity of sanctuaries, particularly during the big religious feasts when there was obviously an extra demand for vases of a special type. In fact, the association of particular workshops with particular sanctuaries noticed on Samos (the Naukratis Painter and the Boreads Painter produced many vases for the sanctuary of Hera while the miniaturists around the Hunt Painter worked for that of Artemis) suggests a possible installation by the sanctuary, or at least a direct contact between the producer and his clients through a trader who knew well the needs of the local clientele. We cannot be certain whether the vases were carried on Samian ships (something very probable since Samos was an important trading force at the time) or on ships of other merchants cities such as Phokaia or Aigina, or whether they were carried by the producers themselves. It has been suggested that the big diffusion of Laconian vases in the second quarter of the sixth century indicates that at least some *perioikoi* had their own ships (Cartledge 1979, 143). For a chart of distribution of all known Laconian black-figured vases which have been attributed to a painter or workshop (716 vases in total) see [Figure 5.6](#).

The other main purchaser of Laconian black-figure was Etruria (Pipili 2014) where the local wealthy and powerful aristocracy also demanded luxury cups such as those which were popular with the Samos elite. Furthermore, the orientalizing style of Laconian pottery must have been valued there, too. Hence the steady import of Laconian from the start and throughout the third quarter of the sixth century. All Laconian vase-painters are well represented in Etruria with good works. Kept almost intact in the Etruscan chamber tombs at Vulci and Cerveteri where most of them were deposited, they are those which are best known to us today. There is also a fair amount of Laconian from the *emporion* of Gravisca (Boitani 1990) where the main interest lies in the elucidation of the origin of the traders who were involved in the diffusion of these products in Etruria. The large amount of East Greek material, together with the epigraphic evidence, indicates the important role that East Greeks had in this trade (Boitani 1990, 19). A few Laconian vases were found in the Etruscan sanctuary of Portonaccio at Veii, and at sanctuaries of Latium which was in the sixth century under Etruscan influence (at Lavinium near Rome and in the sacred area of S. Omobono in Rome). Etruria was, in both the second and the third quarters of the sixth century, a very good client for Laconian black-figure and certainly contributed to its development.

Of the other places where there is a fair concentration of Laconian, most were connected to Sparta in one way or another: Olympia, where Attic and Corinthian black-figure is neither plentiful nor of high quality, has given a good number of Laconian, some of it of excellent quality (Kunze-Goette 2000). In fact, most of the Laconian vases found in mainland Greece come from Olympia which was close to Sparta and where the Spartans had an

important role as participants and often winners in the Olympic Games. Votive inscriptions on some vases, and the many special scenes which refer to the deity worshipped at the site, indicate that these vases had a votive use. They may have been brought from Sparta since many of them belong to the latest period of Laconian black-figure, that is, to a period when Laconian rarely travelled outside Sparta. Alternatively, these vases may have been made on the spot to be purchased either by Spartans or by visitors from any other city.

A fair amount of Laconian was found in the Greek colonies on the Libyan coast, Cyrene (Schaus 1985; Mei 2013) and Tocra (Boardman–Hayes 1966), in both cases at a sanctuary of Demeter. According to tradition Sparta was involved in Cyrene's foundation (Schaus 1985, 98–102). It is interesting to note that the vases from these two sites are two different wholes as regards the shapes, workshops and chronology (for the latter see Pipili 2006, 79, fig. 5). So, we should suppose that each place had its own suppliers. That Cyrene had some special trade connection with Sparta is indicated by the fact that poorer quality vessels have also been found there, as well as some rare shapes which are not usually found outside Laconia (Schaus 1985, 101). The Greek trading town of Naukratis in Egypt also received some Laconian black-figure (Venit 1985 and 1988). It has been suggested that there was a direct trade route between Egypt and the Cyrenaica and that the traders arrived at Naukratis from Cyrene (Schaus 1980), but there are differences in the Laconian material found in these two sites which do not support this view. The Laconian vases from Naukratis are mostly by the Naukratis and the Boreads Painter, the two painters who are most prominent on Samos, and they disappear almost totally at about the middle of the century, i.e. at the same time that there is a great reduction of Laconian at the Samian Heraion (see above [section 5.6.2](#)). Samian merchants were active at Naukratis where they had erected a sanctuary of Hera which was a branch of the Samian Heraion, and in the few cases where the Laconian vases from Naukratis bear incised dedicatory inscriptions these are in an Ionic script used by Samos. We should suppose, therefore, that those vases came to Naukratis via Samos.

Laconian vases have been found, as would be expected, in graves of Taras (Pelagatti 1955–56), the Laconian colony in South Italy, some of them quite early. A good amount of Laconian black-figure, most of it very fragmentary, comes from Saturo, the ancient Satyrion, a few kilometers south in the heel of Italy and possibly the first Laconian settlement at the gulf of Taras (Pelagatti–Stibbe 2002). The vases come from a votive deposit at a grotto where the local nymph Satyria was worshipped.

Sicily, which was one of the biggest markets for Laconian black-glaze, especially kraters, imported also some black-figure (Pelagatti 1990, 128–30). This comes from Gela, Himera, Megara Hyblaia, Selinous, Syracuse and, more importantly because of the many high-stemmed cups, from a votive

deposit of a sanctuary of Demeter at Catania (Rizza 1960; Rizza 1990). Concerning the material from Sicily, we should note the presence of some unusual shapes which had probably a special ritual use.

In Greece itself, apart from Olympia, Laconian black-figure was found also at the sanctuaries of Aigina (Felten 1982; Williams 1993), at Perachora (Shefton 1962), the sanctuary of Parthenos at Neapolis (Kavala) (Bakalakis 1938; Pipili 2012), the Artemision of Thasos (Pipili 2012) and sparsely from other sites.

We should note here that Laconian black-figure had a primarily votive function in the Greek world. The vast majority comes from sanctuaries and only a small number from graves of Boeotia, Rhodes, the Argolid, Sicily, and most of all Taras, presumably because of the Laconian origin of its inhabitants. But even in Taras the vases are neither plentiful nor of the quality one would expect from the site. The important corpus from Satyrion shows that this is where the finest Laconian black-figured vases were directed in the area of Taras, and it is worthy of note that, as is the rule with Laconian, they were deposited in a sacred area.

In the sanctuaries the Laconian cups may have been used as drinking vessels during ritual or secular meals for which most of the larger shapes – kraters and dinoi – were obviously purchased. But it is more likely that the high-stemmed Laconian cups, with their elegant shape, white slip and colourful decoration, were regarded as luxurious items particularly fit for dedication. We should note that at Olympia, where pottery never played a great role and was mostly used for private purposes by the visitors and not for ritual or dedication (Bentz 2009, 14–16), the Laconian cups had exceptionally a primarily votive use as several votive inscriptions and the special iconography of many cups seem to suggest. It is also possible that these cups were used in ritual, perhaps as libation ware.

5.8 The Laconian Black-Glazed Pottery

During the sixth century BC Laconian potters also produced vessels which are totally black in imitation of metal, or decorated with secondary patterns only. Unlike Laconian black-figure which concentrated almost exclusively on cups, the black-glazed production of Sparta displays a great variety of shapes: kraters, stamnoi, hydriai, amphorae, oinochoai, as well as the smaller cups, mugs, kantharoi, lakainai, aryballoi. The krater and the aryballos were the most popular shapes of all. They were produced in large quantities and exported over a very wide area of the Mediterranean. The main type of Laconian black-glazed krater is the ‘stirrup-krater’, named after the shape of its handle: a semicircular grip on the shoulder linked to the rim by a vertical strap. It appears either in an all-black version or, less frequently, with a linear

pattern on the reserved and slipped lip ([Figure 5.7](#)).



Figure 5.7 Laconian black-glazed stirrup-krater. Agrigento.

Source: Copyright Regione Siciliana – Assessorato Regionale dei Beni Culturali e dell’I. S. – Su concessione del Museo Archeologico Reg.le “Pietro Griffo” di Agrigento.

The other main type of krater in Laconia, the volute-krater, was usually decorated in black-figure. Most black-glazed kraters were produced in the first half of the sixth century and a large number were exported to Etruria. From the middle of the century they become less common in Etruria, cease to be exported to the Eastern Mediterranean, and are found mainly in Sicily. Towards the end of the sixth century there is a renewed interest in the shape, with large numbers exported to Sicily and Apulia in South Italy (Pelagatti 1990, 138–44) where local imitations are also attested. The production of kraters continues until about the mid-fifth century. The other widely exported Laconian black-glazed shape, the aryballos, was particularly popular in its globular form during the first half of the sixth century. It is usually decorated

on the top of the mouth and the belly with a broad purple band between white lines which sometimes enclose a row of white dots. Another popular shape of the first half of the sixth century was the *lakaina*. It had a black wall, squares and dots on the rim and upright rays on the body.

After the middle of the sixth century the proportion of black-glazed Laconian pottery increases in relation to black-figure. And in the last quarter of the century, when Laconian black-figure was mostly restricted to a local use, the black-glazed production which probably had no serious competitor was still exported in notable numbers.

We should note here that some vase-shapes issued from the Laconian pottery workshops were considered peculiar to Sparta and are recorded as such in the ancient written sources. Thus, the word '*lakaina*' (the feminine of the adjective '*lakon*') was used for a certain type of cup which was obviously regarded as typically Laconian (Athenaeus XI, 484f.). We also hear of the '*krater lakonikos*' which has been identified with much probability with the volute-krater (perhaps also with the stirrup-krater from which it probably evolved: Stibbe 1989, 17–18), a renowned Laconian vase-shape manufactured both in bronze and in clay. Finally, the Athenian Kritias praises the '*lakedaimonian kothon*' (Athenaeus XI 483b), a type of mug, as being the most suitable for a soldier to carry and drink from. The fact that several vase shapes should be associated specifically with Sparta by later writers indicates Sparta's success and originality in the sphere of pottery industry.

5.9 The Laconian Red-Figure Style

From the fifth century BC onwards, fine figured pottery in Greece was produced almost exclusively in Athens. However, during the second half of the fifth century and the first half of the fourth, a few sites in mainland Greece (Boeotia, Corinth, Olympia, Laconia, Eretria, Crete) produced some red-figured pottery which imitated Attic. Laconian red-figure seems to have begun c.420 BC, during the Peloponnesian War, and to have ended c.370 BC, perhaps after the political turmoil which followed the defeat at Leuktra (McPhee 1986, 158). There are sherds from Sparta (mainly from the Spartan Acropolis) (McPhee 1986) and some whole vases in a similar style from a domestic ritual context at Analipsis, in the frontier area of Kynouria (Karouzou 1985). The most important shape is the large mug which seems to have had a ritual or votive function. Other open shapes are the bell-krater, the calyx-krater, the stemless cup and the plate. Recently some more red-figured fragments which can be attributed to Sparta on account of shape and iconography were made known (Stroszeck 2006). They come from the Athenian Kerameikos and had been offered to the grave of the Lakedaimonians who had fallen at Athens in 403 BC in a ritual which

followed the burial. The fragments belong to four vases of the same open shape – a calyx-krater or a kalathos – and are decorated with scenes which had some relation to their recipients (cult dances, hunting, fighting). The centre or centres of manufacture of the Laconian red-figure production is not known, nor is the role that itinerant potters-painters may have had in it.

5.10 Laconian Vase Iconography

Mythical scenes or isolated emblematic figures on Laconian black-figured vases are drawn from the common archaic repertoire and follow mostly Corinthian prototypes. The round field of the interior of the cup, the main carrier of Laconian imagery, was appropriate for single figures – gods shown outside a narrative context (e.g., Zeus and his eagle, Poseidon riding a hippokamp, a goddess surrounded by winged sprites) or daemons (Chimaira, Gorgons and Gorgoneia, sea-monsters) – which appear often. Of the heroes Herakles is the most popular, his fight against the Hydra and the Cretan Bull appearing several times. Other favoured stories are the Boreads chasing the Harpies, Achilles ambushing Troilos, a Boar Hunt which may be identified with the Calydonian, the capture of Silenos by the guards of Midas, this last one probably because of the connections with East Greece. The restricted space of the tondo often led the painters to reduce the many-figured compositions or to split them into more than one field. Thus, Achilles ambushing at a fountain appears over a secondary zone which contains Troilos and his sister Polyxena (Pipili 1987, 27–8, figs. 41–3). When, on a cup by the Rider Painter in the Louvre (Pipili 1987, 51, fig. 77), Troilos and Polyxena are omitted and the half-kneeling warrior attacks the snake that is also present at the fountain in some Achilles and Troilos scenes, we have obviously a different story. In the same way the image of a komast dancing in front of a fountain on a cup in the manner of the Rider Painter (Pipili 1987, 75, fig. 107) is clearly modelled after that of Silenos approaching the fountain before his capture by Midas (Pipili 1987, 39, fig. 53). It is not always easy to understand by what process the images are turned to new ones and what is the meaning of the latter, especially since there are very few inscriptions on Laconian vases.

The tendency to recognize subjects of Cyrenean interest in Laconian black-figure (Faustoferri 1985) apart from the two certain such cases, the Arkesilas scene and the image of the nymph Cyrene struggling with a lion on a cup in Taranto (Pelagatti 1955–56, 43, fig. 42), was already obsolete once the old theory about the Cyrenean origin of Laconian vases had been proved a fallacy. There has also been an attempt to link the Laconian vase imagery of the third quarter of the sixth century with the iconography of the Throne of Apollo at Amyklai, an architectural complex decorated with a great number of

mythical scenes, so as to justify a higher dating of the Throne – to the mid-sixth century instead of the usual late sixth (Faustoferri 2006).

A great part of Laconian black-figure iconography is devoted to everyday life scenes which may also have a cult dimension – banqueting (Figures 5.3), revelling with or without a musician (Figure 5.8), or horse-riding (Figure 5.9).



Figure 5.8 Laconian cup. Florence 3879. Attributed to the Hunt Painter.

Source: Su concessione della Soprintendenza Archeologia della Toscana – Firenze.



Figure 5.9 Laconian cup. British Museum B 1. Attributed to the Rider Painter.

Source: © The Trustees of the British Museum.

The role of the Naukratis Painter in introducing these scenes, which follow basically Corinthian models, was pivotal (Pipili 1998). For several decades the Naukratis Painter's compositions, his ornate style (very characteristic are the volutes crowning many figures and the many birds and reptiles filling the background), and such original iconographic types as the small winged daemons present in some scenes, were reproduced by other painters, and this may suggest that there were picture books in the workshops from which the Laconian ceramists drew their images. Everyday life scenes on Laconian vases have usually been viewed in terms of Spartan life, secular or religious (see, for example, Pipili 1987, 71–6; Powell 1998). This raises problems in the case of the symposia which seem to contradict the famous Spartan austerity and the exclusion of women from the *syssitia*, and it has been suggested either that they are mere copies of Corinthian with no connection to real life (Lane 1933–34, 158), or that they refer to Laconian religious practices not known to us (Dentzer 1982, 94; cf. Pipili 1987, 72–3), or that they reflect life in the years before austerity (Powell 1998, 128–9). The komos scenes, on the contrary, are more easily understood in Spartan terms since we know that orgiastic dances were performed in some festivals of Artemis or Dionysos in Sparta and the Peloponnese more generally (Pipili 1987, 106, nn.

711–12). Besides, some vases from the Orthia sanctuary show revels, sometimes highly sexual (Pipili 1987, 66, fig. 95; for a detailed examination of this cup, Powell 1998, 130–5), and one type of lead figurine from the site is that of a komast.

In recent years, however, the increase in the known material and the turn of interest to the production and distribution of Laconian black-figure brought out its customer-oriented character (Pipili 2006; Coudin 2009a; Coudin 2009b). We may now be fairly certain that Laconian potters and painters had knowledge of the destination of their vases and of the wishes of their clients. Some of the vases might even have been special commissions made on the spot (see above [section 5.7](#)). It is, therefore, more reasonable to view the everyday life or cult images on these vases through the eyes of those who bought and used them, and not take them altogether as evidence for ‘the ideology of the Spartiates, their virtues and occupations’ (Ridley 1974, 287) or for the existence or not of an austere society (Powell 1998), unless they come from Sparta itself, as for instance the sexual vase from the Orthia sanctuary mentioned above.

The votive function of much of Laconian black-figured pottery, and the social and religious context of aristocratic Samos and Etruria where most early vases were directed, help explain the prevalence of images which either reflect the interests of the aristocracy or are related to cult practice. The Naukratis Painter who introduced most such scenes was particularly tied to Samos for which he probably created symposia, komoi and horse-riding scenes as well as his peculiar winged daemons, probably a symbol of love and happiness or an allusion to a higher religious atmosphere (on these daemons, Pipili 1987, 71–6; Pipili 1998, 89; Powell 1998, 123–6; Thomsen 2011, 57–147). On a fine cup by the Arkesilas Painter ([Figure 5.3](#)) who copies closely the Naukratis Painter’s style it is very probable that the painter wished to reproduce life on Samos (as first suggested by Carter 1989; see above [section 5.5.2](#)): the diners recline on the ground as was common in the East and one of the women wears an oriental turban, the *mitra*. The symposia dedicated in sanctuaries represent either ritual meals or secular aristocratic banquets. They are often accompanied by komasts who are performing a ritual dance or merely taking part in a sympotic event (for the iconography of the Laconian komos see Smith 1998; Smith 2010, 119–49). When the komasts are not placed next to a symposium, the banquet may be suggested by the presence of a krater. Sometimes there is an imposing lyre player among the revellers (e.g. Stibbe 2004, pl. 49, 1) who has improbably been regarded as a god – Apollo or Dionysos.

Another popular image is that of a young rider sometimes surrounded by water-birds and winged creatures ([Figure 5.9](#)). The best preserved cups (Pipili 1987, 76, figs. 108–9) come from Etruria, where the image of the rider had the same aristocratic value as in Greece and was presumably much sought after.

They are all in the manner of the Naukratis Painter for whom there are indications that he produced such cups for the Samian Heraion. The presence of winged daemons has led to their interpretation as heroized dead (Stibbe 1974), in the same way that some symposia featuring such sprites have been regarded as funerary meals (bibliography in Pipili 1987, 106, nn. 686, 690). This is a most improbable interpretation, since we now have three such symposia with komasts present and, moreover, two of these vases come from sanctuaries. Above all, for the images of symposia and riders we have to take into consideration the fact that they seem to copy earlier works created by the Naukratis Painter for a certain aristocratic clientele.

An image created by the Naukratis Painter for dedication in sanctuaries is that of a goddess accompanied by winged daemons. The Naukratis Painter's name-vase (Pipili 1987, 40, fig. 54) comes from one of the sanctuaries of Naukratis, perhaps that of Aphrodite, in which case the goddess would be Aphrodite surrounded by Erotes. At least two such cups were found at the Heraion of Samos (Pipili 1987, 41, figs. 102–3), where the goddess would have been identified as Hera.

Other vases made to be used or dedicated in sanctuaries are the chalices from the deposit of the Artemis sanctuary (see above [section 5.6.2](#)) many of which are decorated appropriately with processions (Pipili 2001, 62–75, figs. 43–6, 49–53), often with old men leaning on their staffs. There is also a choir of youths wrapped in mantles, flute players among them (Pipili 2001, 77–9, figs. 54–5). Processions appear also on fragmentary vases from Sparta, alluding obviously to local cult (see the fragments of a lakaina from the Orthia sanctuary: Stibbe 1972, no. 205, fig. 68, 1). Riders are a constant element in these religious occasions. They are presumably young nobles who honour the deity by their high status, and it is probably from such processions that the single riders accompanied by small daemons are taken.

Finally, specifically made for dedication is a series of cups showing an enthroned god or couple approached by worshippers in an iconographic scheme close to that on the large scale Laconian stone reliefs (Pipili 1987, 60–3; Pipili 1998, 94–5) ([Figure 5.10](#)).



Figure 5.10 Laconian cup. Olympia K 1292

(Photo: Czakó, DAI Athen, neg. no. 4992).

The series starts with the Naukratis and the Boreads Painters and continues until the end of the Laconian black-figure production in the last quarter of the sixth century with some excellent works from Olympia. In all cases the god shown seems to be the one worshipped on the site. This category of vases is really remarkable and confirms what was the direction of much of the Laconian black-figure ceramic production: they were vases made mainly to be dedicated and were decorated accordingly.

From what we have seen, it comes as no surprise that themes of purely Laconian interest are absent from the Laconian black-figure vase imagery. Gods and heroes who were important in Laconia (Apollo, the Dioskouroi, Menelaos and Helen) are not represented on vases and neither are scenes which have to do with some essential characteristics of Spartan society, such as the elaborate initiatory rituals for both boys and girls or Spartan homosexuality (for a possible representation of the latter see Powell 1998, 130–5). Also, scenes of athletics are conspicuously rare for a Laconian production. Those Laconian styles which were not made for export, however – the late degenerate black-figure and the short-lived red-figure – have a different iconography. A late cup from the sanctuary of Agamemnon and Cassandra at Amyklai shows a hero holding a kantharos and a snake below it, an image identical to that of the Laconian stone reliefs (Stibbe 1994b, 77, fig. 1), and other cup fragments from the site are decorated simply with kantharoi

or snakes (Stibbe 1994b, 81–2, figs. 9–15). In red-figure we have either local stories, such as the birth of Helen (Karouzou 1985, pls. 4–6, 7a), or activities of young Spartiates – hunting, fighting and dancing with the special crowns that we know were worn by youths in some Spartan festivals such as the Gymnopaïdiai or the Karneia (Stroszeck 2006, 111, fig. 8a. c. f; 113, fig. 11a; 114, fig. 12a; 115, fig. 13a–c). The bronze statuettes which were bought mostly by the Spartans themselves to be dedicated in Laconian sanctuaries or in the panhellenic sanctuaries of Olympia and Dodona, often have the same purely Laconian-oriented character; there are many statuettes of warriors and several of youths wearing the special crowns of Laconian festivals. The Laconian black-figured vases with few exceptions were not destined for the local market. They were made by a small number of potters and painters almost exclusively for foreign clients and this should not be overlooked if we wish to understand not only the iconography but the whole special character of Laconian black-figure, this finest product of the Laconian ceramic craft.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

The most comprehensive study of Laconian pottery from Geometric onwards is Lane 1933–34, excellent but seriously outdated. Useful up-to-date brief accounts are to be found in Fitzhardinge 1980 and such basic handbooks as Cook 1997 and Boardman 1998.

For the earliest Laconian pottery styles, see Desborough 1952, 283–90; Coldstream 1968, 212–14; Desborough 1972, 240–3; Coulson 1985, for Protogeometric; Coldstream 1968, 215–19; 1977, 157–60, for Late Geometric; Margreiter 1988 for the period down to the late seventh century BC

The fundamental work on Laconian black-figure, with particular emphasis on the development of the cup shape, is Stibbe 1972, supplemented by Stibbe 2004. These studies superseded previous attempts to identify individual Laconian vase-painters, Lane 1933–34 and Shefton 1954, which, nevertheless, may be profitably consulted for their many astute observations. A seminar organized by M. Torelli in Perugia in 1981 (Pompili 1986) very usefully touched upon the organization of the Laconian black-figure workshops. The non-figured pottery is examined in detail according to shape in a series of studies by Stibbe which are basic works of reference: Stibbe 1989; 1994a; 2000. Archaic Laconian pottery is viewed together with other classes of Laconian artifacts in Förtsch 2001. For Laconian red-figure, see McPhee 1986

and Stroszeck 2006.

For the distribution of Laconian pottery, see Nafissi 1989, Pipili 2006 and Coudin 2009a. For vases found in Sparta itself, see mainly J.P. Droop in Dawkins 1929, 52–116 (for Artemis Orthia) and Droop 1926–27 (for the Spartan Acropolis). In recent years more archaeological data from Laconia concerning particularly domestic ware has been added by the Laconia Survey, a rural sites field survey carried out by the British School at Athens: Cavanagh et al. 1996; 2002.

For a detailed analysis of the subject matter of Laconian black-figure vases, see Pipili 1987. Further useful iconographic studies: Faustoferri 1986, Pipili 1998, Powell 1998, Faustoferri 2006, Coudin 2009b, Thomsen 2011, 57–147.

CHAPTER 6

Laconian Art

Francis Prost (Translated by James Roy)

Ancient art is very difficult to define, whatever city produces it. It is never thought of in its own right – the Greek term *technē* does not convey what our contemporary West understands by *art* – and it does not work according to rules of its own. Art in antiquity is structured by principles generated outside its field, in this case principles of a political, religious, or social nature. Thus we are often in practice unable to distinguish the product of art from the product of craftsmanship: our concepts seem most of the time inadequate for the objects to which they apply. Laconian art is no exception to the rule, and many of the current debates about it would gain in clarity if we possessed some texts to offer us a modicum of illumination. For instance, when scholars seek to show the role of Spartan austerity in the evolution of artistic production, they limit themselves to objects of luxury and high prestige, supposedly condemned by the egalitarian civic ideology of the *homoioi*; when, on the other hand, they seek to disconnect the art of Sparta from any direct political context, they employ both bronze and lead, ivory and stone, statues and statuettes, vases and pots, which allows them to demonstrate that no political decision could intervene in the general lines of evolution of the entire Laconian material production. The two positions have no doubt been defended by good arguments, but they must both be rejected insofar as, most often, neither the one nor the other takes the trouble to consider closely what basis there is for the categories of object that are considered, or excluded from consideration.

For want of a solution to this dilemma the art historian can only trust in the objective evidence that makes up his or her knowledge, namely style. And Laconian style constitutes a guiding thread that is particularly noticeable in archaeological evidence of many kinds, as almost one hundred years of research have shown since the work of E. Langlotz. Not that he was the first to write of Laconian art, but it was he who most distinctly succeeded, on the basis of an analytical description of the stylistic characteristics of work produced at Sparta, in establishing a category of objects that one can group under the name of Laconian art.

6.1 Definition of a Laconian Style

The diversity of the creations of the Greek archaic period has led many researchers to reconstitute sets of formally identical items and to establish for each of these sets a stylistic identity card that ties closely together the components over fairly long chronological periods. These items unfortunately do not always have a known provenance, but some, those known to have been discovered grouped together on the same site, such as the Samian Heraion, the sanctuary at Delos, or the Athenian Akropolis, allow the recognition of conventional structures of representation that make up the set's identifying signature. Observing that a particular artistic tradition was associated with certain regions of archaic Greece, and even, more precisely, with certain cities, specialists, following in the wake of Langlotz ((1927), 86–98 for Laconian art), have put together groups both varied and spread out over time that might include equally bronze statuettes and painted vases or reliefs on ivory, marble sculptures and terracottas or coins, and that all shared the same permanent formal characteristics in the representation of the human face or body. Most certainly not every aspect of the theory can be accepted. Langlotz set out from ethnic conceptions in order to propose an interpretation of the stylistic differences in the representation of the human body. Writing at a time and in a Europe where the notion of race seemed the only possible explanation of all differences, he saw in the multiple corporeal structures revealed by archaic plastic art the unconscious expression of the Greek peoples whose craftsmen, through their works, revealed radically opposed conceptions and relations to the human body (see the critical presentation of Förtsch (2001b), 9–12). Today nothing of these first beginnings is accepted, even if the formal, stylistic, categories established by Langlotz are still eminently useful. Ultimately, the illuminating parallels established, for example, between the various forms of Laconian productions show explicitly that a style developed *in* a city, on different materials, with different techniques, is also the style *of* that city, and that, rather than introducing questions of race, it is preferable to turn to principles of cultural statement.

Nonetheless, Greek cities only rarely offer a homogeneous stylistic appearance, a rigorous formal coherence from beginning to end of their history. Often, the hesitation of specialists in the face of what seems to them a composite assemblage of influences and of diverse traditions, or even disagreement over the attribution of certain statues or vases, has cast doubt – perhaps unfairly – on the validity of scholarly enquiries. However, Laconian creations have posed few such problems. With the exception of the much-debated Vix krater, the Laconian style does not raise any major difficulty of identification or recognition. In fact the products of Laconian workshops, together with Corinthian and Argive art, constitute one of the best examples of a system of formal conventions which is homogeneous and easily recognizable. Thanks to the excavations carried out on the territory of Sparta, and in particular in the light of the exceptional finds from the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia, Langlotz was able to define an entire series of stylistic criteria

that constitute the foundation of studies on Laconian art. Comparison of the evidence from objects of small-scale plastic art in bronze, on ivories or on reliefs, like the shapes on black-figure pottery, allows the definition of technical and formal characteristics that are strictly Laconian. In short, Spartan art does not create, unlike many other archaic outputs, any difficulty of identification.

Better still, specialists in plastic art in bronze have been able to reconstruct the genesis of the style – an exceptional case in the history of Greek art, and one that illustrates the way in which conventional structures of representation arise and come to predominate. In publishing small Geometric offerings in bronze from Olympia (Herrmann (1964); see also Heilmeyer (1979)), Rolley has shown convincingly that a group of small horses in bronze, as early as the second quarter of the eighth century, had employed new formulae worked out in reaction to the Argive creations which are the first attested in the sanctuary (Rolley (1992), 37–49; (1994), 97–100 and 104–8). Through a desire to distinguish themselves from the offerings of their powerful Peloponnesian neighbour, these works adopt, in the sanctuary of Zeus, formal traits characteristic of Laconian production of prestige offerings, at the very moment when the city of Sparta, no doubt, is being formed, the Olympic competitions are established, and a veiled rivalry with Corinth sets in. These horses, with a very short neck, and a massive and undifferentiated head, show small ears, brutally cut off at their tip: the body is squat, fairly bulky, vigorous, and the legs are stiff, as if stretched. It has been shown that, without exception, the profile of the breast forms a sharp angle – a detail due to the shaping of the model and the mould for fabrication, because the channel for casting ended at the muzzle with a vent on the breast, while on the Argive horses the channel for casting ended at the hindquarters (Zimmermann (1989)). These Laconian horses were no doubt independent statuettes, since very few tripods have been found in Laconia: save for the most ancient, they are mounted on rectangular bases, often perforated and equipped with an extension that allows the tail to be fixed. It is therefore at Olympia, in the competitive context of the offerings and the contests, that the Laconians defined the broad outlines of a specific style. It is also possible to attribute to Laconian workshops little birds of the same period, no doubt cocks, which were either independent statuettes, or else decorative elements, of vases for instance, or else ear-rings. However the evidence is less clear than for the horses, since the distribution covers alike Laconia, Samos and Macedonia.

Representations of humans defined in a Laconian identity came some decades later. Several figured examples show that the process was begun in the years 740–730, at a time when the production of horses at Olympia is tending to disappear, perhaps when the first Messenian War is starting (Heilmeyer (1979), 129–32). These human figures too do not come only from Olympia, but also from Laconia itself. They are statuettes, made of lead for the most

part and less often of bronze. They are less well represented in the sanctuary at Olympia than the horses. In the oldest examples, it is difficult to see a distinctive style, something true also for the only statuette of the period discovered in Laconia. At the end of the eighth century some statuettes of a seated man are found, including one drinking, which introduce a certain schematic quality typical of Laconian production. In the sanctuary of Zeus a group in bronze has been found which shows the combat of a male figure, hero or god, against a centaur, and which some attribute to a Laconian workshop (New York Metropolitan Museum 17.190.2072; Zimmermann (1989), 143–4). Above all, a large head in terracotta, about 11 cm high, from the Amyklaion at Sparta, and perhaps belonging to the divinities of the Apollonian triad, shows some of the traits of the face that will be found later in the works in bronze and in ivory (Athens, MNA 4381: our [Figures 6.1](#) and [6.2](#)), such as the elongated form of the head, the protruding chin and the large, staring eyes. This is one of the first appearances of the conventions for representing the Laconian face, conventions which would long survive.



Figure 6.1 Man's head with helmet, frontal. Terracotta. Athens, National Museum, inv. 4381. InstNegAthen NM3347.

Source: Photograph: Wagner, DAI, Neg. D-DAI-ATH-NM 3347. All rights reserved.



Figure 6.2 Man's head with helmet, in profile. Terracotta. Athens, National Museum, inv. 4381. InstNegAthen 72.366.

Source: Photograph: Hellner, DAI, Neg. D-DAI-ATH-1972/366. All rights reserved.

6.2 The Conventions of Human Representation in the Seventh to Sixth Centuries

It is above all from the seventh century onwards that we can follow the type of these representations, remarkably permanent and faithful to Laconian conventions of construction. Here R.J.H. Jenkins claimed to see one of the major contributions to the 'dedalic' style, alongside those of Crete, of Corinth, and of Rhodes (Jenkins (1936)). Langlotz, however, had recognized and well described the Laconian conventions ten years earlier, emphasizing the entirely distinctive qualities which allow us to identify Laconian representations of the seventh and sixth centuries. He underlined the austerity of the modelling, the avoidance of any rounding of the bodies, the vigour of the lines and the sparseness of the cuts, the very flat relief of the volumes, but also almost fleshless physiognomies, short and not very thick torsos, long legs, stiff carriage of the head, an oval form of the face. The seventh century marks the high point of Laconian artistic production. We have several series, well represented in various sanctuaries of Laconia, such as that of Artemis Orthia and the Menelaion: little lead figures, cast in a mould with one valve, little appliques of hammered bronze that represent a female head face-on showing several formal Laconian traits (Cavanagh and Laxton (1984), 23–36), or objects in bone and ivory, not to mention terracotta figurines. Apart from the appliques in bronze, all these series continue into the sixth century, and offer an iconographic repertory that is finally limited to winged goddesses, gods flanked by wild animals, female figures with a *polos* head dress, and hoplites. The heads that are found on the small ivory plaques, whether they are those of the 'mistress of the animals' or those of a male divinity, show a formal schema of stark carving, to such an extent that Jenkins, although determined to make them fit a single 'dedalic' category alongside the production of other major centres of the first half of the seventh century, was obliged to describe them as coarse and provincial. Through this negative judgment, he effectively recognized their entirely original character. Certainly, for some rare types of object, such as the *perirrhanteria*, ritual sprinklers, it is difficult to distinguish Laconian work from other products. Found on sites with no obvious common element, such as Sparta, Olympia, the Isthmos, Delphi, Samos, Rhodes, and Selinous, these cult objects are not all, as has been claimed, of the same Laconian marble. Rather, they share a strong oriental heritage, with lions surmounted by korai, but are the work of various Greek workshops, Spartan and other (Rolley (1994), 144–5).

More clearly Laconian are the reliefs called heroic. Various iconographic indications, such as the snake, the pomegranate, the egg, prove that these plaques in local marble or in terracotta were indeed consecrated in the context of a hero cult attested already from the eighth century (Herfort-Koch (1986), 76–8 and 130–2; Hibler (1993), 199–204; Salapata (1993), 189–97; Förtsch (2001b), 217–21). Serving both as votive objects and funerary monuments, they are attested above all at the end of the archaic period, but continue until Hellenistic times. The most famous example is that of Chrysapha (Berlin, 273: our [Figure 6.3](#)), one of the most ancient, which shows a couple sitting on

a throne.

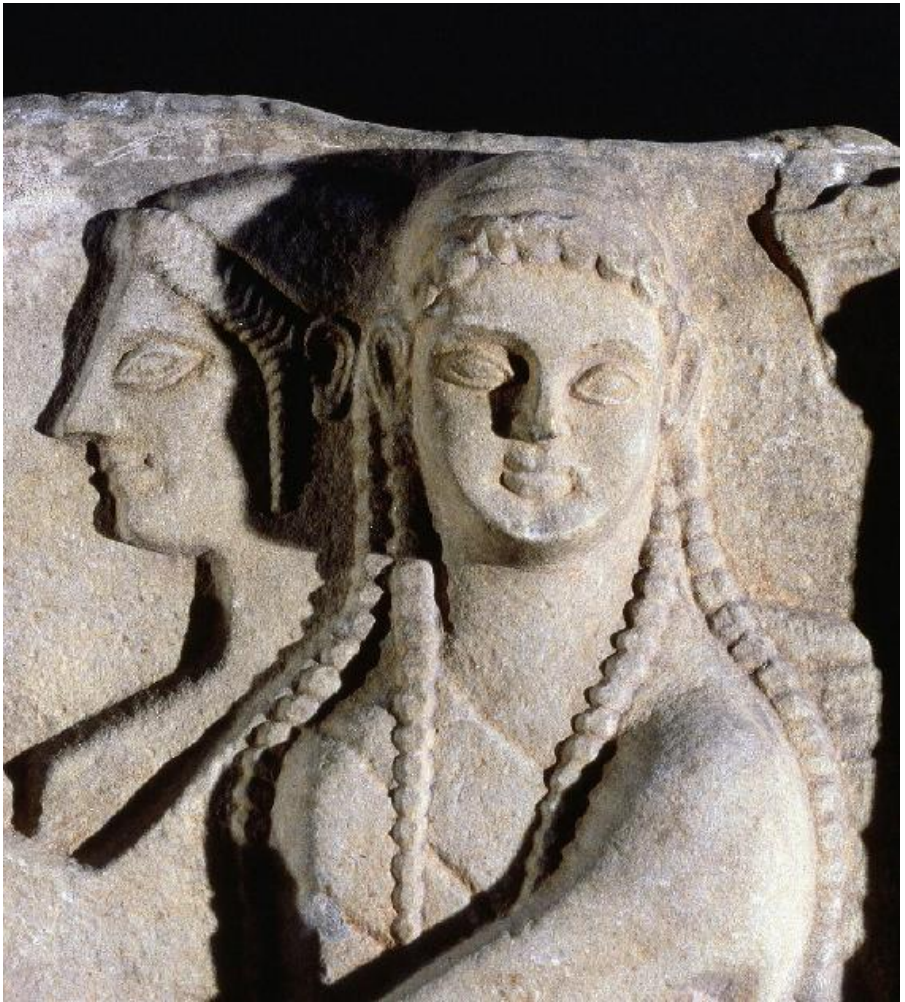


Figure 6.3 Heroic relief from Chrysapha. Marble. Berlin, Staatl. Mus., Antikensammlung, inv. 731.

Source: Photo Juergen Liepe. © 2016. Photo Scala, Florence/bpk, Bildagentur für Kunst, Kultur und Geschichte, Berlin.

The male figure is brandishing a kantharos while the female figure is taking off her veil, and a serpent is rising behind the seat. Even if influences from eastern Greece have recently been seen in this relief (Bencze (2010)), the structure of the face offers a remarkable example of Laconian stylization: through planes superimposed and detached one from another in an abrupt manner the face shows volumes with sharp edges, and over the eyes, almond-shaped as if swollen, there are prominent eyebrows, while there is almost a nutcracker chin, scarcely modelled. The austerity with which the stone is shaped is not due to clumsiness, since the details of both the hero's and the

heroine's hair, not to mention the throne, show meticulous care in the sculptor's choices of form. These are the principles that we find also in the bronze statuettes, which have made the reputation of Laconian artists (in general: Rolley (1977), 125–40; Herfort-Koch (1986); Förtsch (2001b), 221–4). Made according to a limited number of statuary types, among which stand out that of the Palladion, that of the hoplite, and that of the girl, naked or nearly so, often used as the foot of a mirror (Stibbe (2007), 17–102), these bronze statuettes share a shaping of the face which links them as a stylistic signature. On the heads, cut almost square and severely modelled, with no great volume, Langlotz emphasized the emphasis on the eyes, as if staring and globular, under the full curve of the eyebrows. At the end of the sixth century the head takes the form of a little ball framed at the corners by two hollows that make it stand out. Ultimately it is still the type of head that one finds also in large stone sculpture, of which we have only a few traces (Förtsch (2001b), 214–17), even though marble quarries were worked in Laconia as early as the archaic period (Christien (1989), 75–105 and this work, Vol. 2, Ch. 24; Christien and Della Santa (2002), 203–16). The famous colossal head in the museum at Olympia, perhaps Hera, is unquestionably Laconian, as is shown by the parallel with a small ivory head from the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia kept in Oxford (Marangou (1969), 161, fig. 127; Bencze (2013)). The supposed Leonidas (Sparta Museum 3365: our [Figure 6.4](#)) is also marked by the Laconian conventions.



Figure 6.4 The pseudo-‘Leonidas’. Marble. Sparta Museum, inv. 3365.

Source: The Art Archive / Archaeological Museum Sparta / Gianni Dagli Orti.

The ‘Leonidas’ belonged to a group of two symmetrical figures in combat, of which there survive, besides the torso, a leg clad in a greave and two fragments of a shield in relief. Although often compared to figures on the pediments of the temple of Aphaia on Aigina, this torso has preserved a head whose eyes were originally inset and have today disappeared; it also shows a stylization that is frequently seen on the small bronzes, particularly the hoplites; the moustache is shaved while the chin, covered by a long beard,

projects markedly. From this trait, at the beginning of the fifth century, we see that workshops are continuing the traditions of Laconian representation into the period of the severe style: certain funerary stelai (Stibbe (1996)) show it equally.

For illustrating the principles of Laconian representation, the figurines in ivory and lead are also important. Between the beginning of the seventh and the middle of the sixth century, several workshops using ivory operated at Sparta over roughly three generations, certainly in order to provide precious offerings for the pilgrims to the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia (Marangou (1969)). Of a high technical quality and a great iconographic diversity, the objects in ivory or in bone are the product of an art that was only rarely exported (to Samos), and which was not influenced stylistically by any imports. At first we find small plaques of fibulae decorated with reliefs; then animals lying down appear. Seals bear a sculpted head, and some of the figurines show types known as 'dedalic'. But from the beginning of the seventh century, the conventions of the Spartan face are in place, as is shown explicitly by a fragmentary head from the National Museum in Athens (MNA 16366), in every respect comparable to the terracotta head found at the Amyklaion (Athens MNA 4381).

As for the lead figurines, the state of the evidence is unfortunately more difficult, for, since the excavations of the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia and the first British publications (chapter XI in Dawkins (1929), 249–84), little stylistic research has been carried out on these objects, relegated to the Sparta Museum and waiting for a new specialist study. Yet the sheer quantity of items recovered – more than 100,000 in the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia and nearly 6,000 in the Menelaion, and some fine sets also in the Amyklaion and in other Laconian sanctuaries – provides for the history of human representation in Laconia a remarkable series of objects and allows us to trace stylistic continuities from the seventh century until the third BC (Figure 6.5). The workshops responsible for this massive output must certainly have been physically close to the Laconian sanctuaries, even if recently analyses of the metal have identified Laureion (in Attike) as the source of supply, and the lead used for the figurines as a byproduct of the extraction of silver (Gill and Vickers (2001), 229–36). It has also been possible to distinguish 561 moulds for sixty-one varieties of shape (Cavanagh and Laxton (1984), 23–36), established over several chronological sequences. Among the oldest human representations, such as those of hoplites or of winged female figures, it is possible to distinguish the characteristic profile of Spartan products, which form virtually an artistic signature: pointed nose, prominent chin, elongated face on slender neck. The very local distribution of these little votive objects, despite some examples exported to the Argive Heraion or to Bassai, confirms that we are dealing with particular Laconian conventions in the representations of living forms.



Figure 6.5 Figurines from the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia. Lead. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. From Gill and Vickers (2001), fig. 2.

Source: © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, AN1923.247-250.

It is therefore clear that a Spartan style, relatively homogeneous and fairly easily identifiable, was able to develop and expand in a whole range of works over two centuries, the seventh and sixth. Sparta in the archaic period employed, as did numerous contemporary great Greek cities – Argos, Samos, Corinth, Naxos, Paros among others – material culture to construct its own

originality and so to assert itself against rival cities. However, Sparta shows also particular features that cannot be reduced to the model of stylistic development at work in the other major Greek centres. These particular features of Laconian art are regularly seen as ‘different’ (Förtsch (2001a), 27–48). Behind the clarity of the stylistic analyses, four major problems are generally identified by scholars: namely, who produced these works with such a characteristic style; in what type of trade were they involved; do the dates of their appearance and of their disappearance depend on an especially significant political and social context; and finally why does Spartan art become marginal in the classical period and the Hellenistic periods? To summarize: the problems of Spartan art come from our limited ability to reconstruct its contextual environment, and not from any difficulty in identifying its specific qualities, which are displayed unambiguously in our archaeological evidence.

6.3 Which Artists?

One of the problems posed by any study of Sparta is to get past the Spartan mirage of our sources, a distorted image of its society and one largely created by non-Spartans. One of the prejudices most deeply rooted in the surviving textual evidence for antiquity consists of a supposed hostility on the part of Sparta to all products of craftsmanship, in the interests of moral austerity and specialization in one single art, that of war. This myth, which more than a century of archaeological discoveries firmly contradicts, has its foundation in several texts. They are essentially Athenian and yet *a priori* free of any prejudice towards the Spartan political model, notably that of Herodotos (2.167.2), for whom the Spartans despise all *cheirotechnai*, and that of Thucydides (1.10.2), who notes the contrast between Sparta’s architectural and material poverty and its military and institutional power. We should add the more general observations of Xenophon (*Oik.* 4.2.3; *Lak. Pol.* 13.5), of Aristotle (*Pol.* 1278a.18–20), of Plutarch (*Lyk.* 24.2; *Ages.* 26.4; *Pel.* 23.3), Aelian (*VH* 6.6), and of Polyainos (2.1.7): for a certain Greek historical tradition all manual activity, all *technē*, is despised at Sparta in favour of the military life alone, and, at least in the fourth century, there was even – supposedly – a law forbidding citizens of Sparta to practise it.

To combat this mirage some contemporary historians have tried to reconnect Spartan citizens with craftsmanship. By seeking to confine any supposed ban to the classical period, a period when the famous Spartan austerity was supposedly in place, some historians, including one of the most important (Cartledge (1976), 115–19), have in effect sought to put the Spartan citizen at

the heart of the creative process. This task is, however, unpromising, since the testimonia are so rare, inconsequential, and scattered in time. Certainly the bronzesmiths Sydras and Chartas are called Spartiates (Pausanias, 6.4.4 and 3.17.6); the brothers Ariston and Telestas, also bronzesmiths of the first half of the sixth century, are called Laconians and Lakedaimonians (Pausanias, 5.23.7); we also know a Kratinos of Sparta (Pausanias, 6.9.4), no doubt a bronzesmith responsible for a statue at Olympia of the athlete Philles of Elea. But the evidence of Pausanias and of inscriptions leaves us merely guessing whether the men named were Spartiates, full citizens. The famous Gitiadas, creator of bronze reliefs and of the cult statue for the temple of Athena Chalkioikos, is a bronzesmith mentioned twice in Pausanias' *Periegesis*; nonetheless his membership of the community of *homoioi* is never made explicit, and is assumed only because of his reputation; he is described by Pausanias (3.17.2) as 'a man of that country'. As for other artists recognized in antiquity, the brothers Medon and Dorykleidas, Theokles, or even Dontas, all bronzesmiths and attested by concise mentions in the *Periegesis*, are called only Lakedaimonians or Laconians in our sources (Pausanias, 5.17.1–2; 6.19.2–4, 8, and 18). Some of them are thought to be pupils of the famous Daidalidai Dipoinos and Skyllis, but that is hardly a sufficient reason to see in them Spartiate citizen craftsmen. From the dawn of the classical period there has been found, in the sanctuary of Apollo Hyperteleatas at Sparta, a *perirrhanterion* dedicated by a certain Damar[atos], perhaps the king of that name, and bearing the signature of the sculptor Kyranaios, literally 'Cyrenean' (Jeffery (1990), no. 43). The latter name *may* be that of a citizen, in view of the close relations between Sparta and Kyrene. Finally, in the Hellenistic period Ainetidas and Antilas, sculptors attested by their signature (*IG* V 1.208), could be – but again there is no certainty – citizens. This short list, not exhaustive, shows how very difficult is the literary and epigraphic evidence (for further information see Förtsch (2001b), 22–3; Van Wees, this volume, pp. 213 and 231 n.58).

Consequently a quite different view prevails in modern literature, one which draws attention to the importance of the role of the *perioikoi*. Moreover, that is why it is more accurate to speak of 'Laconian' art than of 'Spartan' art. Production of artistic objects is almost always presented as being in the hands of non-Spartiates. Even if some artisan crafts were not incompatible with full citizenship in the archaic period (and for that period, at least, no ban is attested concerning such activity), it is commonly supposed that the *perioikoi* were essentially responsible for the fabrication of, for instance, decorated pottery and objects in bronze. It must however be underlined that our evidence gives no support for such a hypothesis: we have found no perioikic site that could show buildings for workshops; we know of no artist designated in due form as a *perioikos*; and the studies that lead us to situate in perioikic territory some of the workshops of painted pottery, such as that of the oldest workshop of black-figured Laconian vases, that of the the Painter of the

Boreadai (see the comprehensive tables presented by Pompili (1986), 65–74; Nafissi (1989), 68–88; Hodkinson (1998a), 97–102), are based to a considerable extent on hypotheses that cannot be tested.

Moreover our sources, for their part, speak rather of foreign artists. In the field of architecture the *skias*, meeting-place of the Spartiate assembly and circular in shape, was built by the architect Theodoros of Samos (Pausanias, 3.12.10). More striking still, at Amyklai, where the festival of the Hyakinthia was held, there stood the throne of Apollo, an extraordinary structure where the statue of the god and his altar are set in an elaborately decorated architectural construction: Pausanias (3.18.9) describes it for us minutely and preserves the memory of the man who conceived it, Bathykles of Magnesia, certainly Magnesia on the Meander. There is scarcely anything than can be categorized with confidence as Laconian apart from roof tiles and, more certainly, the large circular terracotta *akroteria* for the ridge of roofs (Försch (2001b), 208–14). In the field of painted pottery the Boreads Painter is perhaps Ionian, like the other great artist of black-figure, the Naukratis Painter (Stibbe (1972), 12; Pompili (1986), 66). The *perioikoi* are not mentioned by any ancient source. It is easy to understand why modern scholars have had great difficulty in grasping their exact role and have suggested that they were for a long time confined to the process of production alone, reserving the distribution and the export of material to travelling foreigners or to the Spartiates themselves (Rolley (1977), 136; Rolley (1994), 273–4). That is a view, however, that must be reconsidered. In fact these *perioikoi*, if they do indeed produce the items themselves, have an intimate knowledge of the Spartiate way of life that they represent in the scenes on the black-figure vases and they develop an iconographic repertory based on luxury and leisure that seem very far from their own social condition; moreover, several *perioikoi* can write Laconian inscriptions on the vases, and some have seen the palace of Arkesilas II of Kyrene since they are able to represent the scene of the weighing of silphium (Powell (1998), 119–46).

Ultimately, the presence of non-Spartiates engaged in the process of artistic production should not be at all surprising for an archaeologist of archaic Greece: the integration of foreigners coming from the cities of Greece or Asia Minor, or from farther away, in Athenian craftsmanship of the archaic period shows how common the phenomenon was. What on the contrary never ceases to surprise, and what poses a major historical problem that specialists never tackle as such, is understanding how an art so homogeneous from a stylistic point of view, and probably used by the Spartiates alone in their prestige offerings, at the sanctuary of Artemis Orthis as at Olympia, can be the result of production delegated, largely or entirely, to non-Spartiates. For the patterns of representation, so typically Laconian, which are found in objects of bronze and terracotta and ivory form a complex that cannot be the result of the isolated initiative of this or that workshop or this or that artist but which

involves the whole community. In the patterns of reference that constitute a style, it is the assertion of collective identity that is at stake. The other major styles of the archaic period show this very well: the coherence of the styles of Corinth, Argos, Naxos, Paros, or Samos – certainly in these cases produced by citizen craftsmen – demonstrates how far certain cities equipped themselves with the means to express at the level of artistic creation a certain image of their social and collective cohesion. The Spartiates clearly understood it in that way, since the little Geometric horses, the first Laconian products that we can trace, were shaped in awareness of the Argive and Corinthian horses, in a relationship of rivalry and emulation at the very heart of the sanctuary at Olympia. If the hypothesis of the production of all these Laconian offerings by the *perioikoi* were to be maintained, that would imply a fair degree of social homogeneity in archaic Lakeldaimon.

6.4 What Trade?

Another element often presented as a special feature of Laconian art is its widespread circulation. In fact, that is a special feature only in relation to a certain view of Spartan art and indeed of Sparta in the archaic and classical periods. But it is significant that, from the Geometric period, as we have seen, with the little bronze horses, Laconian art is defined in confrontation with other outputs.

The starting point must be one fact: the main body of the products that can be included in the category of art has been found outside Sparta and even outside Laconia. The fine black-figure pottery, for instance, through the sixth century underwent impressive development (Pipili (1987) and this volume, Ch. 5; Margreiter (1988)), no doubt attaining its peak of production in the second quarter of the century. As several studies have already shown (Stibbe (1972); Nafissi (1989), 68–88; Nafissi (1991), 240–52), this success was the result of some dynamic workshops, which produce very reduced quantities of decorated vases in comparison to the non-decorated vases, and especially in comparison to the other centres of black-figure production such as Corinth or Athens. Attention is drawn particularly to two workshops that can be clearly identified, one of which seems to absorb the other in the middle of the sixth century, when the Naukratis Painter ceased his output; this combined workshop went into decline in the 530s, with the end of the vases of the Hunt Painter, and then ceased all production in the 510s. The proportion of figured Laconian pottery that was in use locally at Sparta is tiny. It was in the great majority of cases a product for export to different areas of the Mediterranean, and its evolution and even its varied fortunes over time cannot be explained by a simple recourse to Sparta's internal political context (Hodkinson (1998a), 93–118). The findspots of the identified vases of the painters (Naukratis,

Boread, Arkesilas, Hunt, and Rider Painters) speak for themselves: of 155 vases, eighty-nine come from Samos, eighteen from Naukratis, twelve from Kyrenaika, eleven from Olympia, five from Thrace, and three from Sicily against thirteen from Laconia (Pipili (1998), 85–96, and this volume, [Chapter 5](#)). It has been possible to uphold the view that the Laconian workshops of figured pottery had been able to establish trading networks from major centres like Samos, Taras (Tarentum) or Olympia, and that the shapes and iconographic themes chosen in the sixth century had been adapted and elaborated for quite specific foreign customers: the markets were targeted (Coudin (2009), 227–63; Pipili, this volume, [Chapter 5](#)). In the same way, even if bronze figurines have been found in Laconian sanctuaries like that of Artemis Orthia or the Menelaion, generally speaking the bronze objects have to a great extent been excavated outside Laconia: at Olympia, but also at Dodone and in the Carpathians, in Magna Graecia and in Sicily. The representations of girls ([Figure 6.6](#)), boys wearing crowns of reeds, hoplites ([Figure 6.7](#)), women dressed in the peplos, mythological figures, or even the heads that decorate the handles of the fine bronze tableware produced from the 590s onwards are all witnesses to the stylistic diffusion of the Laconian workshops outside Laconia (Rolley (1997), 134; Rolley (1982); Rolley (1994), 244–6).



Figure 6.6 Girl running. Bronze. Athens, National Museum, Carapanos Collection, inv. 24.

Source: The Art Archive / DeA Picture Library / G. Nimatallah.



Figure 6.7 Hoplite. Bronze. G. Ortiz Collection. From *In pursuit of the Absolute Art of the Ancient World. The George Ortiz Collection*, catalogue of the exhibition, Royal Academy of Arts, London, January–April 1994 (1994), no. 117.

Source: Collection George Ortiz.

In addition, some scholars (Huxley (1962), 62–5; Stibbe (1972), 4–5) have tended to exaggerate Sparta's place in the flowering of the arts in the archaic period and to speak of 'international trade' concerning products that were, however, limited in quantity and in time. Rolley ((1977), 125–6) sought to moderate this tendency. He recalled that Laconian art should not be judged en bloc, but that distinctions should be drawn scrupulously according to products: if, on the present state of our knowledge, the large bronze vases were apparently destined only for export, on the other hand the picture is more nuanced for a product so typically Laconian, the bronze mirrors with a girl as handle, which have been found outside Laconia but of which three fine examples have been dug up at Sparta itself and in the surrounding area. Moreover, it would be completely mistaken to think that the Spartans exported bronze objects because they despised precious metals and contented themselves with cheaper material (Wace (1929), 250). The lead figurines, votive offerings found in all the Laconian sanctuaries and often in very great numbers (notably in the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia), have on the contrary made it possible to demonstrate that the development of these offerings marked the self-assertion of the hoplites of the *damos* in the sixth century (Nafissi (1989), 75; Nafissi (1991), 253); moreover, the chronology of the lead figurines seems to match, apart from a few freaks, that of the bronze figurines: the Spartiates never abandoned the bronze ex-votos in favour of lead offerings alone. On the contrary, the two materials served, simultaneously, as the medium for the Laconian stylistic models, with more or less the same phases of expansion and decline (Hodkinson (1998a), 107).

It is, however, true that many Spartan products have been excavated outside Laconia. The further back one goes in time, the clearer and simpler the explanations are. If small bronze sculptures of the eighth century are found in the sanctuary at Olympia, it is because of the votive offerings that are made there. But we must speak of trade when, in the sixth century, these objects circulate in both the eastern and the western Mediterranean. Although embodied in objects that are in the final analysis limited in number, the Laconian style has thus spread into almost all regions of the Greek world and in almost the entire Mediterranean – with associated problems for measuring its influence and its role. Even at Olympia, from the Geometric period, the stylistic imitations seem to be the work of local workshops, established near the sanctuary of Zeus, in direct contact with the itinerant Spartan workshops that provide for the Laconian faithful little horses or bulls in bronze. The effects of stylistic contamination are obvious. Heilmeyer has been able to draw up coherent groups of horses and bulls that adopt, in an almost caricatural manner, traits distinctive to Laconian and Argive horses, without however being identical: the term 'Argivo-Laconian style', or 'Lakono-Olympian', has therefore been used (Heilmeyer (1979)). In the seventh century the artistic objects discovered outside Laconia are rarer. They are the *perirrhanteria*, found, as mentioned above, at Sparta but also at Olympia, the

Isthmos, Delphi, Samos, Rhodes, and Selinous, which are evidence of the key role of the Laconian style in this very particular production, even if, in this respect too, local creations must have reinterpreted certain motifs. Notably the faces of the korai and the heads preserved at Olympia and at Selinous, show a formal structure that is surely Laconian, but that is not the case for the examples from the Isthmos or from Rhodes. This prevents us from seeing in them the work of a single, unique, workshop. Rolley ((1994), 144) thought that the *perirrhanteria* were original local creations, limited in number, whose spread reflected the vigour of exchanges in the period, and in which Sparta had played a decisive (though now inevitably somewhat obscure) role as a driving force.

Relations with the eastern Greeks offer clearer evidence. Here Samos has a special place. Among the Greek works that have been dug up in the sanctuary of Hera, the finds include not only bronze statuettes, quite obviously Laconian, but also some rare ivories, the style of which can also be identified without difficulty: the famous plaque which represents Perseus beheading the Gorgon and is dated to the end of the seventh century is Laconian (Marangou (1969), 75–6). These relations will continue until the 530s, though there is no need to connect the end of Laconian objects at Samos to the rise to power of the famous and influential tyrant Polykrates. But Samos is not the only Ionian centre to maintain privileged relations with Sparta. The presence at Sparta of Bathykles, from Magnesia on the Meander, may even suggest close exchanges with the Ionian coast and lead to wider questions as to whether and how far east Greece influenced stylistic developments of Laconian art themselves, even in certain figurines of banqueters (Bencze (2010), 35–51). It is obviously very difficult to have an exact idea of the style of the images on the throne of Athena: the iconographic themes listed in the description of Pausanias (3.18.9–16) point in the direction of a decorative programme that is heavily contextualized (Faustoferri (1993), 159–66), but the parallels between the few preserved architectural fragments and the mouldings of the altar of Rhoikos at Samos show how close exchanges between the two regions could be. This integration of Ionian elements at Sparta itself in no way prevented the Spartiates from thinking of this throne as an essential component of their identity and their greatness, one that formed, on the heights of Hagia Kyriaki, a sort of symbolic counterpoint to their akropolis (Faustoferri (1996)).

But it is certainly the discoveries in a colonial context, dated to the seventh and sixth centuries, that create the greatest difficulties in reconstructing the routes by which Laconian art works circulated. What is in fact striking is the very great influence of the Laconian style on the outputs of Magna Graecia, at least comparable in quality to those of Corinth for example, while it is achieved with much smaller numbers. Nonetheless the routes followed by the objects cannot be clearly traced. Thus, at Taras, a Spartan colony where Laconian pottery is well attested, we might expect to find from the seventh

century the distinct qualities of the Laconian style in small-scale plastic arts. In fact, among the few terracotta figurines or the first antefixes with female heads produced on the spot, some show Laconian traits but they are very much a minority. The ivories and a few rare large-scale heads allow us to suppose models that came from Sparta. But the local workshops seem sufficiently dynamic to create new forms out of those rare Laconian types that are present, or sometimes to pursue traditions called 'dedalic' when mainland Greece has already abandoned an entire series of conventions, like the layered wigs. Archaeological research prefers to speak of the stroke of 'inventive eclecticism' (the expression of Croissant (1993), 539–59, adopted by Rolley (1994), 297) to describe all those colonial outputs that mark themselves out more or less clearly from the models of the great Greek cities in contact with the west. The differences are even clearer in the bronzes of the sixth century. The colonial workmanship of the west boldly elaborated its own stylistic languages on the basis of tendencies of a different origin. Particularly notable are the moulds that allow the spread of Laconian bronze statuette-faces or vases: the sites of Gela, Lokroi, Kamarina, and Metapontum have revealed heads manifestly created in this way. These adoptions of forms, mostly limited to the face alone, can be seen in certain statuettes both of maenads, at Taras for instance, and of hoplites as far as Sicily. The best stylistic parallel for the Dodone hoplite, Laconian because he has a beard without a moustache (Ioannina 4913; Rolley (1982), fig. 190–1), is the hoplite of Francavilla Marittima, in the territory of ancient Sybaris (Rolley (1982), fig. 192–3).

This influence of Spartan style leads us to construct a strange geography of the distribution of items of Laconian art. Sometimes we have a colonial site, but very few Laconian objects: this is the case at Taras where only certain rare large terracottas have precise parallels at Sparta in the sixth century, while the small terracottas adopt other patterns of formal construction. Above all, bronzes of Spartan conception are unknown at Taras, which manifestly, from this point of view, did not serve as a commercial conduit for its metropolis (Bencze (2013)). We know today, thanks to finds of bronze vases north of Brindisi or mirrors dug up at Syracuse, that products coming from Sparta entered Italy by other routes than through its colonies. On the other hand, we sometimes have Laconian or lakonizing objects which it is impossible to link to a particular site, because of the spread of the material, or the influence of other styles, such as the Corinthian, on these particular objects. The most famous example in which we detect in the background a decisive role played by Laconian formal structures, even if they are not the only influences at work, continues to be large bronze tableware (Rolley (1982); Förtsch (2001b), 204–6). All archaeologists agree in recognizing one single workshop as the origin of large bronze vessels produced between 540 and 520 or 510. They are: four hydrias found in the heroön in the agora at Paestum, a hydria from Sala Consilina, two handles from Olympia, and a hydria found in Macedonia. These all show, by their decoration and their very characteristic forms, the

finest manifestation of the Laconian style. To this ‘workshop of the Paestum hydrias’ some have wanted to add vessels that are very close but yet somewhat different, like the vessels excavated from the tombs at Trbenische (Illyria), the Hochdorf cauldron (Baden-Württemberg), and above all the krater from the princely tomb at Vix (Châtillon-sur-Seine, Burgundy). Despite positions stoutly maintained in an extensive German (and Dutch) historical tradition (notably Stibbe (1996), 128–62), that argues from the form of the vessel and its frieze with hoplites in asserting attribution to Laconia, several specialists of Greek bronzes have observed characteristics peculiar to Corinth, notably in the silhouette of the figure on the lid, and maintain an origin in Corinth or in Magna Graecia (synthesis of the question: Rolley (2003)).

In any case, Laconian art spread throughout the Mediterranean area. More, no doubt, than the writings of historians or the diffusion of certain myths (Malkin (1994)), it is indeed Laconian art that bears witness to the living and dynamic existence of a Spartan Mediterranean during the whole archaic period.

6.5 What History?

Laconian art presents a chronology that is both clear and complex. Clear, because the emergence and the disappearance of a Laconian style are dated unambiguously. As we have seen, born at the end of the eighth century in opposition to the styles of Argive and Corinthian dedications, the Spartan style disappears at the end of the sixth century or in the first half of the fifth. This chronology is not in itself unique and surprising, because in archaic Greece numerous artistic outputs follow the same timetable: for instance Samian objects, although strongly characterised in the seventh and sixth centuries thanks to the works in marble, bronze, and terracotta, undergo the same sort of development. Corinth, Naxos, or Argos show, with some chronological differences, an almost identical pattern. The Laconian conventions for representing the human body and face perhaps arise earlier than those of many other creative centres, but they are abandoned, without necessarily being replaced, at a period when many are undergoing major changes. If specialists detect greater complexity in the case of Sparta, that is because the majority of Spartan products not only lose their stylistic identity, but also because some seem to stop abruptly and to disappear for ever, whatever degree of quality there was in their fabrication. Studies of Laconian pottery or of the objects in bronze thus show periods of production more or less long but all finishing at the end of the archaic period or in the first half of the fifth century, disappearing completely. There is not *one* history of Laconian art: there are *histories*, clashing, segmented, and thus difficult to dissolve into the overall history of Sparta (useful recapitulative tables in Förtsch (2001b), annexes 1 and 2).

Thus, the production of Laconian vases seems to have a limited lifespan and to disappear fairly quickly from the end of the sixth century. It should immediately be added that this general development is only true in part, and needs to be made more precise. It rests exclusively on the history of figured pottery and leaves aside black-glaze vases without decoration. The distinctions between Laconian craftsmanship and Laconian art must here be given their full weight: from that point of view, craftsmanship never ceased at Sparta, even after 500; on the other hand it is figured ware that offers a limited chronological duration, and finishes by disappearing completely. Within ceramic production several groups can be distinguished according to the shape of the vases. Some of these groups began their production around 725 (see for example the 'late Geometric group' of Pelagatti-Stibbe (1992), 75) and ceased around the 650s. Others, like the craters or certain cups with a foot, appeared later, in the seventh century, but continued to be decorated until the first decades of the fifth century (Stibbe (1989), 14, 22, 91). It is, however, indisputable that the Laconian style which established itself in human representation in the archaic period shades off progressively from the end of the fifth century. A Laconian red-figure (McPhee (1986), 153–65), coming above all from the Akropolis at Sparta, has been known for some time. One may see in it arguments to resist the idea that Spartans were utterly conservative, and to assert their ability to adapt to new techniques. But this red-figure nonetheless remains a faithful imitation of Attic red-figure and offers no characteristic that is truly Laconian. For local use, it is rather evidence that Sparta, in this domain, abandons all creativity and leaves to imitators, from the fifth century, the task of producing its tableware. At that date figured pottery no longer has a place in the history of the Laconian style.

In a fairly similar way, bronze objects present a complex chronological situation. For a long time, archaeologists were obliged to base their views on a few assemblages of objects, essentially those of finds from the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia and from Olympia. However, dedications coming from the Menelaion, from the sanctuary of Apollo at Amyklai, and from the sanctuaries on the Akropolis at Sparta, led to a revision of this picture and to a much more nuanced account of Laconian small bronzes. The female statuettes with a chiton, following closely on the hydriai called the Telestas group, appear in the last third of the eighth century and disappear at the end of the seventh century. Then the little bronze kouroi, the animal types, or even the naked girls serving as supports for mirrors seem to take over, between the end of the seventh century and the last quarter of the sixth (Herfort-Koch (1986)). Other shapes develop for much briefer periods, such as the little peplophoroi, the girls running, the korai with a chiton and a himation, the statuettes of athletes or of hoplites (on all these forms see again Herfort-Koch (1986)). For a long time it was thought that the 550s had been decisive in the abandonment of certain types, and that a decisive step, launching the art of Laconian bronze on an irredeemable decline, had been taken from the middle of the century. In

fact there is no truth in this idea: shapes succeed each other, sometimes overlap, seem to relate to symbolic and social investments difficult to quantify and measure, and in some cases pass the middle of the century with no difficulty, although all stop towards 500 (Förtsch (1998), 48–54).

It should be noted that, unlike the chronology of the various artistic productions discussed, stone sculpture, although very badly preserved among the material traces of the archaic period, undergoes developments well after 500. Certain funerary stelai of the fifth century have long been known (Stibbe (1996), 254–8), and a conference held at Athens in 1992 (Palagia-Coulson (1993)) offered an opportunity to publish several fragments later than the archaic period. This made it possible to swell the ranks of Laconian statuary, too often reduced to Leonidas alone. For example, an Athena *promachos* of which only a few fragments survive (particularly of the shield), was certainly executed at the very beginning of the fifth century and anticipates the Athena of Pheidias at the entrance to the Akropolis in Athens, perhaps thanks to the dynamism of an Ionian artist well integrated at Sparta (Palagia (1993), 167–76). Heroic reliefs, down to the Hellenistic period, undergo certain formal and iconographic changes (Hibler (1993), 199–204).

In order to explain such great variation in the chronology of all these artistic outputs, and especially the break around 500, more or less sharp according to the material, scholars have essentially asked whether one should invoke the particular conditions of the Spartiate lifestyle and society (among others Dickens (1908), 67; Stubbs (1935), 32–7; Holladay (1977), 111–26; Fitzhardinge (1980), 53–76; Hodkinson (1998a), 93–118; Förtsch (1998), 48–54; Hodkinson (2000), especially 19–64; Förtsch (2001b), 12–45). No one denies the importance of political austerity in the fifth century, which must have contributed to chasing out of the city every form of luxury and craftsmanship, and some argue for the departure of foreign craftsmen under socially homogenizing pressure from the *homoioi* in the classical period. However no consensus has been reached on measuring the degree of influence of social features and political events on the history of artistic productions. As Förtsch has usefully recalled ((1998), 48–9; (2001b), 34–7), several types of answer have been given. The first, upheld from the first campaigns carried out in the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia, was to subordinate the developments in Spartan art to the specific conditions of political and social life at Sparta. Struck by their exceptional finds from the early archaic period and by the decline in Laconian works from the middle of the sixth century, the excavators put forward the idea that the famous Spartan austerity, so prominent in literary sources from the fifth century onwards, had probably been fostered from the time of the ephor Chilon. However, as archaeological discoveries progressively revealed that Laconian art was produced much later than 550 and even continued to thrive, in certain forms, after 500, this position was abandoned. Instead scholars now tried to disconnect completely all

development in Laconian art from the political context. The new argument took one of two forms. A radical version held that there was a separation in principle between Laconian art and politics. A subtler version asserted that Spartiate society did not have the means to impose restrictions in the artistic field. Problems, however, remained. For example, the absence of any *kouros* or *kore* modelled in the round, whether votive or funerary (with a few exceptions: Bonias (1993), 177–88), or on the other hand the existence of certain artistic forms almost exclusive to Laconian art, such as the bronze statuettes of naked women, cry out to be connected with social customs peculiar to the world of the Spartans. They can scarcely find a place in a history of art isolated from all social and political context.

A third position has been maintained particularly by two scholars, Nafissi (1991) and Förtsch (2001b), though their respective reasoning differs. Luxury, and therefore works of art, became ambivalent in Spartiate society. For Nafissi, austerity was not decreed abruptly, but rather was the result of a long process allowing the hoplite *damos*, during the sixth century, to take on customs and social markers which, previously, had been the prerogative of the aristocratic elite. Later, in the fifth century, the *damos* may have restricted or eliminated such symbols, out of a concern for social equality. Likewise for Förtsch: faced with tension between, on the one hand, aristocratic habits of competition through luxury and, on the other, a more restrictive attitude towards luxurious symbols, Spartiate society was unable to negotiate a *modus vivendi* and finally abandoned traditional manifestations of aristocratic prestige. Social distinction within Sparta, or rivalry between cities, was then sought by other means.

Whatever historical explanation one adopts, and however closely or distantly one relates artistic forms to changes in society and politics, one may agree that craftsmanship probably did not wither away in Laconia after 500, but that a certain conception of art disappeared from Laconian society after that date. Hodkinson ((1998b), 55–63) has rightly observed that both archaeologists and historians focused too narrowly on the production of the objects and on their decline after 500, without worrying about their uses and their social and religious context. Nonetheless the art historian still seeks to understand this disappearance of the Laconian style in its own right, this progressive abandonment of forms of human representation which had, for more than two centuries, contributed to the spread of Spartan influence in the Mediterranean. And how, moreover, to explain that this stylistic identity did not involve the complete disappearance of large prestigious Spartiate dedications? Leaving aside the artistic works commemorating the Persian Wars, we should like to know more about the two statues of regent Pausanias, victor at Plataia (479), which were erected beside the altar of Athena Chalkioikos at Sparta (recorded by Pausanias the Periegete, 9.16.7), and also about the statues placed some seventy years later on the monument of Lysandros' victorious nauarchs at

Delphi (Pausanias, 10.9.7–11; Plut. *Lys.* 18.1, *De Pyth. Or.* 395), for all of which, incidentally, none of the sculptors was Laconian. If the question takes a peculiar twist for Sparta, that is because we feel fairly sure that the abandonment of the archaic stylistic conventions was not merely part of the general Greek shift from archaism to classical art. Sparta, on the present state of our evidence, seems to miss all the great technical and formal artistic revolutions that inspire the first century of the classical period. Sparta did not adapt to these developments, and seems to make a *choice* against all the new tendencies that are emerging. Sparta emphasises its isolation, and the forms that disappear do not seem on the whole to be replaced, either from internal production or by the importation of objects or artists. Though they might still have occasional recourse to works of art for prestige displays, such as the royal art of the Hellenistic period (Palagia (2006), 205–17), or more simply for precious offerings in sanctuaries, the Spartiates no longer saw their style as a means of expression of their identity or of their conquests. At the same time, exactly the opposite process was going on at Athens.

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As a first approach consult the works of Rolley who, throughout his career, starting from the problem of the attribution of the Vix krater (Châtillon-sur-Seine, Burgundy: Rolley (2003)) never ceased to investigate the material culture of Sparta and Laconia (Rolley (1977) and (1994), *passim*). Then read Förtsch (2001a and 2001b), currently the most complete synthesis, replacing all preceding work.

On the stylistic perspective the starting point must be Langlotz (1927), and no longer Jenkins (1936). For Laconian Geometric art the publications of Herrmann (1964), Heilmeyer (1979), Zimmermann (1989) or Rolley (1992) are basic. On black-figure pottery consult the standard works of Stibbe ((1972), (1989), Pelagatti and Stibbe (1992)), even if several of his views (especially in Stibbe (1996)) are not unanimously accepted. Several studies offer new approaches: Pompili (1986), Margreiter (1988), and, for iconographic studies the works of Pipili ((1987), (1989) and this volume, [Chapter 5](#)), complemented by the articles of Powell (1998), Coudin (2009), 227–63 and Van Wees (this volume, [Chapter 8](#)). For small bronze sculptures the best study is that of Herfort-Koch (1986). For ivories the book of Marangou (1969) remains the standard work. Lead figurines, apart from the excavation reports of the early twentieth century, are dealt with in Cavanagh and Laxton (1984) and Gill and Vickers (2001). Stone reliefs and sculpture are treated in various studies: there are new lines of enquiry in Palagia and Coulson (1993), and also Palagia (2006). There is a fascinating analysis of the throne at Amyklai: Faustoferri (1996). The small-scale sculpture of Taras and, generally, the output of Magna Graecia have also helped importantly in suggesting the extent of the stylistic influence of Laconian workshops: besides Rolley (1994), see recently Bencze (2010) and (2013), which give the bibliography. For historical interpretations of Laconian art, and in particular the problem of Spartan austerity, one must start with Hodkinson (1998a), Hodkinson (1998b), Förtsch (1998) and Förtsch (2001a), and then read Nafissi (1991) and Hodkinson (2000): these works give references to all previous work.

CHAPTER 7

Pre-Classical Sparta as Song Culture

Claude Calame (Translated by James Roy)

‘The cicada is a Spartan, eager for a chorus.’

Pratinas of Phleious (c.500 BC)

The image of a Sparta entirely devoted to physical exercise and military activity seems to be solidly anchored in the idealizing tradition to which the city of Lykourgos gave rise from the fourth century onwards: it emerges clearly, for example, in Xenophon’s short account of the Spartan constitution (*Lak. Pol.* 1.4). But a little earlier in the description of the measures taken by the Spartan lawgiver for the education of young men Xenophon states that Lykourgos instituted among adolescents rivalry in masculine excellence inspired not only by the spectacle of athletic contests but also by listening to the choral songs most worthy to be heard (*ibid.* 4.1–2; cf. Lipka (2002a) 106 and 141–3, and also Hodkinson (1999) 157–77; for the fourth century, see Ducat (2006) 35–67).

Thucydides, in his detailed account of the famous battle of Mantinea (418 BC) in which the Spartans faced a coalition of Athenians, Argives, and allies, records the order and cohesion of the Spartan army which marched in time to the music of the *aulētai* (‘oboe- (or flute-) players’: 5.70). Even though it had neither spectacular temples nor prestigious buildings, even though still divided into villages like the cities of Greece in time past, Sparta nonetheless enjoyed wide power and reputation; and, as in that past time that was the subject of the ‘archaeology’ of Thucydides in Book I, music played an essential role in the training and the practical organisation to which its young citizen-soldiers were subject. As early as the *Odyssey* (15.1), Lakedaimon is described, like other Greek cities, or indeed like Greece as a whole in the *Iliad* (9.478), as *eurukhoros* – which seems to mean ‘with wide areas for choruses’.

7.1 Pre-Classical Sparta as ‘Song Culture’

Yet it is essentially due to two poets, contemporaries of Thucydides, and also Athenians, that the familiar image of a militarized Sparta can be challenged.¹

On the one hand, at the end of the *Lysistrata* (1242–1315) Aristophanes introduces a Laconian voice, although it is unclear whether it is carried by a single singer or by a choral group complementary to the chorus of the comedy, which is made up of Athenians. Be that as it may, this choral voice is raised, singing in Laconian dialect and melic rhythm, to celebrate the reconciliation so long awaited between the Athenians and the Lakedaimonians.² A first song is addressed to Mnemosyne (‘Memory’) who evokes the memory of the battle of Artemision and the courage of king Leonidas, and then calls on Artemis the huntress, who inspires victory and reconciliation. To this Laconian song the ode of the chorus of Athenians replies; with the help of the Charites (‘Graces’): it calls for the invocation in succession of Artemis, her brother Apollo the *chorēgos* (‘chorus-leader’), Bakchos dancing among his Mainads, Zeus and his wife Hera, before evoking the peace desired by Kypris. In reply to this choral song mixing the refrain of the paian and the refrain of Dionysiac song, in response to this generic evocation of panhellenic-looking gods, the Laconian who is the representative of the Spartan chorus is then invited to echo the song by a ‘new Muse’:

Leave in your turn pleasant Taygetos.

Come, Laconian Muse,

come glorify the god of Amyklai, worthy of our regard,

and the mistress in the temple of bronze,

and the noble Tyndaridai,

who sport along the Eurotas.

Come, enter the dance,

come, with light bounds,

that we may sing of Sparta

that loves the choruses of the gods

and the beating of the dancing feet,

when, like fillies,

the girls leap beside the Eurotas,

raising the dust with the rhythm of their feet;

their hair tosses

like that of the Bacchantes

frolicking as they wave the thyrsus.

The daughter of Leda, holy, heads them,

splendid chorus-leader.

In contrast to the divinities of panhellenic scope invoked by the chorus of Athenians, the gods hymned by the choral voice of Laconia all belong to the local pantheon: Amyklaian Apollo, Athena Chalkioikos, the Dioskouroi sons of Tyndareus, Artemis the chorus-leader. Through the cult honours that are paid to them, the members of this constellation of tutelary gods and heroes benefit from musical offerings; these bear witness for Sparta to a remarkable creativity and extensive practice in the arts of the Muses. The aim of the present chapter is to pick up the traces and indications of this local and rich art of the Muses at Sparta, in poetic performances including song, dance, and musical accompaniment (according to the Greek tradition of the *melos* ('song, tune') endorsed by Damon and by Plato, both Athenians: *Republic* 398c–d). We intend here to show the role of ritualized poetic and musical performances in the development of religion and politics in pre-classical Sparta. Poetry was crucial in educating the young men and the young women in Sparta, the men as citizens active in the political community and the army, the women as wives with important cultic functions and as mothers of the future citizens.

Athenians evidently knew well Sparta's local musical tradition, both in its poetic diction and its theology. Euripides, like Aristophanes, shows as much, notably in the famous choral song that leads to the culmination of his play about Helen in Egypt. Before the epiphany of the Dioskouroi announcing the elevation to heroic and divine status of Helen as the wife of Menelaos, the chorus-members call to mind the choral dances that the heroine will be able to join, on her return to Sparta. In a process of 'choral projection' common in Attic tragedy, the companions and followers of the heroine, captives in Egypt, associate their mistress with the worship offered to the Leukippidai; these two heroines are the female counterparts of the Dioskouroi whose wives they will become. Then they associate Helen in turn with the dances in front of the temple of Pallas, in reality the Spartan Athena Chalkioikos, and with the choral processions marking the festival of the Hyakinthia. That great ritual celebration is dedicated to Apollo of Amyklai and his *erōmenos*, his young lover the athlete Hyakinthos (Euripides *Helen* 1465–77, cf. 227–8). Thus we find once more, in the cultic celebration by the choral song of the girls, the tutelary gods of the city of Sparta.

Seen from Athens of the end of the fifth century, Spartan culture of the age of heroes thus appears as a 'song culture' par excellence: and in fact the same is apparently true for historical Sparta right down to the brink of the classical period.

No doubt it is to the idealizing born from the Spartan victory, the Athenian defeat, at the end of the Peloponnesian War that we owe the concentration in our sources on military training at Sparta, linked to the traditional system of the *agōgē* with its age-classes. But in every Greek city founded on educational

competition there was no *gumnikos agōn* ('gymnastic competition') without *mousikos agōn*. As is affirmed by the elegiac distich attributed to Sokrates (fr. 2 Gentili-Prato): 'those who render to the gods the finest honours in choral performances are best in war'. Not only is military training based on the virtues of choral dance, but, as ritual practices, the displays of choral music are part of the celebration of the gods of the civic pantheon. This corresponds to the 'ancient education', presented by Aristophanes in an erotically comic manner as founded on the training of the cithara-player and of the *paidotribēs* ('gymnastics teacher'). On the one hand, according to Aristophanes, harmony was imparted by the arts of the Muses; on the other hand, modesty was taught through the exercises of the *palaistra* ('wrestling ground'). Aristophanes revealingly insists on restraint, which forbids the chastely erotic relations of *erastai* with modest young men to slip into the lascivious tones of the new music and to provoke the louche glances of adults of his own day. All this, in Aristophanes, is an idealizing prescription for the military defence of Athens, through training the hoplite phalanx as it supposedly had been in the days of the courageous warriors of Marathon.

But, still in an Athenian context, Plato with his ideal system of education in the *Laws* probably comes closest to Spartan reality of pre-classical times. He suggests that the man without education (*apaideutos*, 654a) is the man who has not received choral training (*akhoreutos*). In other words, for Plato the educated man is the one who *has* received a choral education. This idea will guide the entire process of thought developed in Book II of the *Laws*, to a remarkable conclusion: 'For us the art of the chorus (*khoreia*, 672e) as a whole was education as a whole'. Indeed the great principles designed to give Plato's new city its institutions and its spirit will be set out in choral form (664b: cf. Powell (1994) 301–7). Thus inflections of the voice and movements of the body, and consequently music and gymnastics, are set under the same choral rhythm. Again in Book VII of the *Laws* dance (*orkhēsis*, 795d) will be presented as the link between musical practice and gymnastic exercises. It is dance which will allow imitation of the nobility of the Muses and education of the soul; dance will, through rhythm, give agility and beauty to the movements of the body. The scenario of the dialogue confirms that Plato has in mind the system of musical education in old-fashioned Sparta. Plato's work is introduced as an ethnographic enquiry that an Athenian pursues, in the company of a Cretan and a Lakedaimonian, before presenting the ideal educational system. Crete and Sparta are chosen because of the traditional character of their respective educational programmes, which were based on music and gymnastics. The Athenian will, however, emphatically reject the central role that homoerotic relations between *erastēs* and *erōmenos* played in such systems. We may recall that in the fourth century, in the Athenian controversy over the liberties introduced by the 'new music', notably in the form of the dithyramb, the musical discipline attributed to the Spartans became an oppositional ideal, associated in particular with the tension and the

austerity of the Dorian musical mode (see already Pratinas fr. 708, 709, and 711 Page; cf. Csapo (2004) 241–5).

Pre-classical Sparta is thus defined, twice over, as a ‘song culture’, as a culture of sung musical performance. On the one hand the entire social and civic life of the Lakedaimonians follows the rhythm of the musical celebrations of the gods of the local pantheon; and on the other the education of the citizen and of his wife takes place through integration into choral groups that confer on the arts of the Muses an educational function, initiatory in character.

7.2 Musical Reforms and Opportunities (Festivals and War)

The list of poets reputed to have been active at Sparta between the beginning of the seventh century and the middle of the sixth is impressive. Believed to have resided in the city were: Terpandros of Lesbos, Thaletas of Gortyn, Xenodamos of Kythera, Xenokritos of Lokroi, Polymnestos of Kolophon, and Sakadas of Argos (the list is given in the *Lexikon* of Pollux 4.66; see Ps.-Plutarch *De Musica* 9 = Terpandros test. 18 Gostoli); not to mention Kinaithon of Lakedaimon (fr. 2 and 3 Bernabé), witness to a Laconian tradition of epic poetry projected by Demetrius of Phaleron (fr. 144 Fortenbaugh-Schütrumpf) onto the heroic age of Sparta. In addition there was Tyrtaios, author of elegiac poems singing of the developed civic and military values of the city, and Alkman, composer of the *partheneia* (‘maiden songs’) that express choral praise of the beauty of the young women of the aristocracy. The cities from which archaic Sparta attracted poets form an impressive range: Gortyn in Crete; Kythera, on an island near Laconia; Argos, Sparta’s perennial rival in the Peloponnese; Lokroi, the flourishing city in Italian Calabria with a legendary aristocratic constitution; Kolophon, the Ionian city of Lydia sung of by Mimnermos; and Lesbos, which underwent from the seventh century to the sixth a musical development made famous by the figures of Alkaios and Sappho. Through the development of its musical culture ‘archaic’ Sparta became a remarkable centre of attraction, from far and wide.

Alkaios and his masculine poetry of political combat, Sappho with her feminine poetry of erotic education: this duality on Lesbos recalls that of Tyrtaios’ poems and those of Alkman at Sparta – at almost the same period. ‘Singer of Lesbos’, Terpandros is reputed to have inspired on the island of ‘song culture’ a school of kithara-playing. On the advice of the oracle at Delphi, the Spartans called in his services to pacify an outbreak of civil disorder, at a moment of ritual banquets. As for Alkman, biographical traditions were divided as to his origin: whether Sardis in Lydia or Messos in

Laconia. The question was already controversial in the school of Aristotle, among the biographers of founding poets,³ and can hardly be decided now.

Numerous musical innovations were attributed to the poets active at Sparta in the seventh and sixth centuries. Terpandros was reputed to be the originator of the kitharodic *nomos* and of the ‘winding’ songs circulating in the symposion, and to have been victor four times at the great kitharodic competition at Delphi. A poet famous across the Greek world, he was believed to be the initiator at Sparta of the first ‘musical institution’ (Ps.-Plutarch *De Musica* 9 = Terpandros test. 18 Gostoli). Through a tangle of ancient testimonies going back especially to the classical logographer Hellanikos of Lesbos, author of a catalogue in verse of the winners at the Spartan festival of the Karneia (*FGrH*. 4 F 85 = Terpandros test. 1 Gostoli), and to the Laconian historian Sosibios, author of a *Chronology* (*FGrH*. 595 F 3), we may suppose that Terpandros was the first winner, on the occasion of the Laconian festival, of the kitharodic competition; and that he himself instituted this musical competition during the sixth Olympiad (i.e. between 676 and 673 BC).

We see here how, in a Greek city, ritual performances of music and its associated arts on religious occasions helped to define the citizen community, of men and women. A determining role at civic festivals belonged to *melic* narration presented in dance, as represented by the form of singing to the kithara made famous by Stesichoros. Terpandros was thought to have introduced the seven-part structure of this form of dramatized narrative, close in its metre and in its narrative character to Homeric diction; but also to have composed kitharodic preambles. Like the *Homeric Hymns* for recital by performers known as rhapsodes, but sung in the form of the *melos*, these poems brought to religious occasions the great narrative songs which helped to found the community (Gostoli (1990) XXIX–XXXVII).

Sacred to the god of founding (see Malkin (1994) 149–57), the festival of the deeply Dorian Karneia extended over nine days: it celebrated the end of military training and the entry of the young citizens, still unmarried, into the adult community (see Richer (2012) 423–56). The ritual took place around the sanctuary of Apollo Karneios, beside the Dromos (‘running track’) where the *neoi*, the new adults, ran their ceremonial races. This long festival included a race for young ‘grape-harvest runners’, a grand ritual meal, an imitation of the military *agōgē*, and, naturally, musical competitions (see Calame (2001) 202–5, and Gostoli (1990) 71–2 and 84–6). Musical and gymnastic forms of education were thus ceremonially honoured, and combined in one of the outstanding celebrations of the Spartan civic calendar. Here was ritual endorsement of the *agōgē*, the Spartan education system with its division of adolescents into age-classes. This ritualized form of education was initiatory in character.⁴ Spartan chronology was expressed in terms of a list of winners at the Karneia; this and much other evidence attests to the intense significance of this festival for Spartans. Historians in the classical period were intrigued

by the uniquely Laconian character of musical (and gymnastic) culture at this civic ritual.

The Greek tradition of musical history associates further founding roles with others linked with Sparta. Thaletas, the Cretan poet, was traditionally connected with *aulos*-playing. Xenodamos, the poet of Kythera, composed *hyporchēmata* (songs accompanied by dancing and mime) and paians (choral chant, often warlike and sung to Apollo). Xenokritos of Lokroi in Magna Graecia, invented a musical style and was the author of poetic compositions classed by some with dithyrambs. Polymnestos of Ionian Lydia, performing in several *nomoi* for the double oboe, is said to have taken over in a new style the poetical forms introduced by Terpanndros and by Klonas, the poet of Tegea (or of Boiotia). And finally Sakadas, *aulos*-player and elegiac poet of Argos, is reputed to have been the first to teach a chorus to sing in succession in the three principal musical styles, Dorian, Phrygian, and Lydian.⁵

The development of musical institutions by these poets is connected with one of the great celebrations marking the social and religious life of the citizens of Sparta: the Gymnopaïdai. These ‘naked games’ are connected, in a treatise on music attributed to Plutarch, with customs elsewhere in the Peloponnese: the ‘Demonstrations’ (*Apodeixeis*) in Arkadia and the ‘Clothing Festival’ (*Endymatia*) at Argos. Apparently peculiar to the Peloponnese, these religious celebrations sanctioned the passage of the young citizens from adolescence to adulthood through the ritual wearing of a prescribed garment and by presentation to the community of adults. Moreover in addition to the gymnastic exercises indicated by the name Gymnopaïdai, the Spartan festival included choral performances (see especially Pausanias 3.11.9, with the interpretation proposed by Calame (2001) 203–4). In what was probably a cultic celebration of the ‘Battle of the Champions’ (see Herodotos 1.82), part of the long struggle in the sixth century between Argos and Sparta for possession of the plain of Thyreatis, these choruses of young adolescents and adults wore wreaths of palm-leaves, from a tree linked to the birth of Apollo on Delos. Dancing naked, adolescents and adults no doubt celebrated the god in songs. The Laconian historian Sosibios (*FGrH* 595 F 5) tells us, in a work on the sacrificial activities of the Lakedaimonians, that the songs had been composed by Thaletas and Alkman; to these were added paians composed by a certain Dionysodotos the Laconian (Athenaeus 15.678b).

As with the Karneia, the musical poetry performed in dance was a formal part of a complex process: the ‘*anthrōpopoiēsis*’ (‘making of a human’) designed to form the Spartiate par excellence through different collective bodily techniques and exercises. As experts in the arts of the Muses and as *khorodidaskaloi* (‘dance-teachers’; see later) the poets had their own ‘author-function’: this covered musical invention, education of future citizens and their wives, and the presiding over ritual ceremonies sanctioning the admission of the adolescents, male and female, to the status of adult. Spartan

order was thus achieved by an integrated musical and ritual *khoreia*.

7.3 Alkman the Political Poet: The Civic Cults

The festivals of the Karneia and the Gymnopaidiai are not the only Spartan civic celebrations to show a choral programme of ritual significance. Alkman's activity as composer and as choral master, known to us essentially through the surviving poems the *Partheneia*, is linked to each of the great moments of festivity and cult that shaped the rhythm of political and social life in Sparta. We have seen how Alkman's poetry was used at the Gymnopaidiai, to initiate warriors. Several other poems of his, unfortunately very fragmentary, refer also to the Dioskouroi, Kastor and Pollux. Heroic figures playing a central role in the polytheistic family of Sparta, and like Herakles or Theseus enjoying a double paternity both divine and human, these sons of Zeus and of Tyndareos were models of the *neos*, the young warrior not yet married and ready to fight to defend the territory and the values of his city. Originally, perhaps, part of a hymn or a partheneion, one of these poetic fragments praises the horsemanship of Kastor and Pollux 'tamers of swift horses' (Alkman fr. 2 + 12 Page-Davies = 2 Calame), while other very fragmentary verses associate them with a chorus of Dymainai, to which we shall return (Alkman fr. 10 (b) Page-Davies = 82a Calame).

The Dioskouroi were worshipped on the Dromos where the races of the young men took place, while their ritual combats were reserved for the Platanistas, an island surrounded by plane trees, and probably specially adapted, on the river Eurotas (Pausanias 3.14.6 and 8). At this locality, certainly centred on the race-track as its name indicates, Pausanias in the second century AD could still see the funerary monuments of numerous Spartan heroes, as well as an ancient statue of Herakles. The Spartan ephebes, as the *sphaireis* ('ball-players') were, dedicated sacrificial offerings to the great hero, two of whose descendants – twins like the Dioskouroi – were believed to have set up the dyarchy (dual kingship) and thus founded the city of Sparta. Not far away was located the sanctuary dedicated to the Dioskouroi and the Charites. This association of the Charites with the Dioskouroi is not surprising since we know that the Laconian Graces, Phaenna and Kleta, had on the road from Sparta to Amyklai a sanctuary, which is mentioned by Pausanias himself (3.18.6). Its foundation is attributed to the primordial king Lakedaimon who was said to have accompanied the act of foundation by the naming of the two local Charites. As marks of identity, their two names designate them as a flash of light ('Phaenna') and a glorious sound ('Kleta'), which are also characteristics of the Dioskouroi. Pausanias adds that Alkman himself was said to have composed a song dedicated to these two female figures, probably seen as counterparts of the Dioskouroi (fr. 62 Page-Davies = 223 Calame).

However, at Sparta the Dioskouroi (or ‘Tyndaridai’) also called to mind, always, the Leukippidai. Like the Dioskouroi, these two heroines (their name meant literally ‘White Mares’) enjoyed a double paternity, divine and mortal; they are in fact the daughters either of Leukippos or of Apollo. According to one of the many variant versions, the Dioskouroi abducted the two ‘White Mares’ on the occasion of their marriage to their cousins, the two sons of Aphareus, sovereign of neighbouring, and rival, Messenia. With the help of their father Zeus, Kastor and Pollux succeeded in killing Idas and Lynkeus who were pursuing them on Mt. Taygetos, and that is how the sons of Tyndareos brought the Leukippidai back to Sparta to marry them; such is the Hellenistic version elaborated by Theokritos (22.137–213), from a more ancient legend. By contrast, the version presented by Pindar in one of his athletic-victory odes (*Nemean* 10.49–90) has Kastor die at the end of the fight on the slope of Taygetos; at the initiative of Zeus the twin brothers, heroized together, will divide their lives between Olympus and Hades.

The Leukippidai possessed a temple at Sparta; looked after by two virgin priestesses who were also known as ‘White Mares’ (Calame (2001) 185–91). The choral group of Euripides’ *Helen* (1465–75) refers to the choral dances that associated the Spartan heroine with the Leukippidai, either on the banks of the Eurotas, or on the space before the temple of Athena Chalkioikos, the tutelary goddess of the city, or again for Apollo on the occasion of the Hyakinthia. That great civic festival was known for its choruses of young men and the participation of girls (see Polykrates *FGrHist* 588 F 1; cf. Richer (2004) 79–82 and 2012 343–82).

The two priestesses of the Leukippidai were in addition associated with the group of eleven young Dionysiadai in celebrating the Spartan Dionysos, Dionysos Kolonatas. Some slight indications relate the musical activity of Alkman both to the Dioskouroi worshipped at Therapne and to the cult offered to the Leukippidai. On the one hand, a fragment of a commentary (fr. 7 Page-Davies = 19 Calame) seems to associate (in a Dionysiac context?) the heroic tale of the Dioskouroi’s struggle against the Apharetidai with the temple at Therapne where Helen was herself worshipped. On the other hand, a further fragment of the same commentary (fr. 8. 1–6 Page-Davies = 20 Calame) alludes to Phoibe and probably to Hilaëira (further names of the Leukippidai) while the indirect tradition mentions the presence of the Leukippidai as maidens in an anonymous poetic fragment that can be attributed to Alkman (fr. lyr. adesp. 1039 Page = Alkman fr. 266⁰ Calame).

Also, among the poetic fragments transmitted under the name of Alkman there are two very fragmentary texts addressed to Apollo;⁶ they could come from songs dedicated to the god at the Gymnopaïdai or perhaps the Hyakinthia, the two great civic festivals which ritually integrated the girls, and above all the young men, into the different social statuses of adult Spartan. Moreover, the scholiast (ancient commentator) enquiring about the

aetiology of the name of the Karneia, the great civic foundation festival, attributes to Alkman a version of the legend that presents a certain Karneos of Troy as the *erōmenos* (the junior lover) of Apollo Karneios; this remarkable version no doubt follows the model given by the young athlete Hyakinthos whose involuntary death at the hands of Apollo serves as aetiological justification for the cult offered to the god at Amyklai and for the celebration of the Hyakinthia.⁷ Thus the poetry and music of Alkman, in the service of the different groups forming the civic community, is attached to almost all the great festivities marking the rhythm of the life of the civic community and of its different groups. Athena Chalkioikos herself is no doubt referred to in two brief fragments of Alkman (fr. 43 Page-Davies = 43 Calame and fr. 87 (c) Page-Davies = 112 Calame: references to his cult in Calame (1983) 506–8); in addition to the choral dances of legend referred to by the chorus of Euripides' *Helen*, the tutelary goddess reigning over the agora of Sparta was honoured by a procession of men in arms. As for the cult of Artemis Orthia and the double cult offered to Helen, elevated to the status of heroine as an adolescent and of divinity as a wife: we shall come to them in a moment.

Sung poetry in different forms, and especially from a chorus, is at the centre of the ritual worship of divinities and heroes, those who affirm the political and moral values of the Spartan community, but are also present at its moments of danger. Sparta, even more clearly than other Greek cities of the archaic age, shows this association between ritual song and danger. The association was echoed even in the tragedy of Euripides or the comedy of Aristophanes, as Athens went through a crisis of its own at the end of the classical fifth century.

7.4 Alkman as *khoro didaskalos*: the *Partheneia*

Of the poet Alkman there have come down to us relatively extensive fragments of two partheneia. In the ancient definition of the corresponding poetic genre, these melic poems were composed for maidens and sung by choruses of girls. They are the poems that Proclus, in his *Bibliotheca* (319b 34), put into the category of *melē* addressed to gods and humans (Calame (1977) II 149–76). The Alexandrian edition of Alkman's poems made up six rolls of papyrus to which was added a seventh book reserved for the long poem 'Diving Women'. The partheneia were contained in the first two books: that shows their importance in number and as poetry.

The partheneion brought most recently to our knowledge is given by two fragments of the *Oxyrhynchus Papyrus* 2387, published in 1957. Very fragmentary, the first series of lines that have survived certainly coincides with the beginning of the poem. The initial invitation to the Muses as 'inhabitants of Olympos' recalls a form of name that recurs through all epic

poetry from the *Iliad* (2.491) to Hesiod's *Theogony* (25 and 52) by way of the *Homeric Hymns* (*Hymn to Hermes* 450). This invocation of the Muses leads to a series of statements called 'self-referential'. These statements with *I* characterize precisely the different forms of melic poetry; in these first-person verses the singer describes, as *I* or *we*, the sung action in which he or she is engaged. In what we perceive of the lines preserved of the poem of Alkman, at the end of the invocation of the Muses of Olympos, the poetic *I* evokes girls who are singing before engaging in a retrospective movement that also is characteristic of the ritual poetry that is melic poetry. In performative manner the poetic *I* conjures up the moment of awakening before the presentation of the song on the public space that is also the space of the choral performance: in this way no doubt we must understand the *agōn* ('contest') to which are summoned, as *I*, the girls of the choral group that is preparing to dance there. 'I shall toss my locks with golden glints': in the performative mode, these are the 'self-referential' words that conclude this introductory strophe. In a verbal act the poetic *I* sings of danced action in which he himself, the poet, is engaged while singing the present partheneion. The form of the 'performative future' (*tinaxō*) taken by the verb of action designating the movement of the locks of hair during the musical performance indicates the 'self-referential' character of the melic poem. These forms turn poetic song into ritual activity.⁸

The second part of the verses in dactylo-trochaic metre revealed to us by the *Oxyrhynchus Papyrus* belongs in the tradition of praise that runs through all classical Greek poetry. At the centre of the laudatory attention of the chorus-members is a graceful Spartan woman, in the glory of her young beauty:

Astymelousa does not reply to me.

[...] wearing a crown,

like a star that crosses the glittering sky [

or like a golden bough

or yet like a light feather

[...]

she steps over [...] with her delicate tread.

] the grace of a perfume from Cyprus [...]

dwells in her hair, the locks of a maiden.

Delicacy of tread as light as a feather, entrancing perfume that completes the grace of a hairstyle, luminous brilliance that recalls the sparkle of a star or the gleam of the gold in the wearing of a crown: finery, comparison, and metaphors combine to sing of a beauty that, according to the conventions of Greek erotic poetry, arouses amorous desire. But the gait praised in the song moves across a precise space: the place is certainly the area for meeting and

exercise referred to in the first strophe by the spatial term *agōn*. Choral group and girl praised in song are in the same place.

The very name of the beautiful Spartan woman sung by the young *choreutai* shows its public character. Through one of those etymologizing plays on words that, in Greek poetry, attribute to the bearer of a proper name a distinctive quality, the name *Astu-meloisa* is explained in the following strophe by *melēma damoi*; the graceful girl is an ‘object of care for the people’, and the ‘people’ thus corresponds to the ‘city’ (*astu*). Through this etymologizing wordplay the chorus-members define, in lines that are unfortunately very mutilated, their own relation to the young woman. And here the poetic *I* makes a conspicuous return. It now expresses the triple wish to attract the attention of the young woman, to grasp this tender person by the hand, and to become her (female) ‘follower’ (the term used, no doubt technical, is here desperately mutilated). In play here are the relations between the young chorus-members, in general adolescent girls, and her who could be their chorus-leader: the three gestures (expressed self-referentially) show a strong erotic meaning.

The characteristically amorous nature of the relation between the girls of the chorus and the woman who is the object of their poetic praise (and who probably takes on the role of their musical leader) is made clear in the most direct words; they are sung at the end of the strophe that follows, after a major lacuna, the lines of the prelude:

[...] by the desire that breaks limbs: she directs to me a look

That melts more than sleep and death.

It is not in vain that she is sweet.

Lusimelēs pothos (or *erōs*): from the *Theogony* of Hesiod (ll. 120–1) onwards, this expression denotes the physical effect of melting limbs provoked by amorous desire. This almost formulaic expression refers to the erotic impulse that leads to its satisfaction on a shared couch, with the reproductive power that Eros exercises in the traditional theogony or in the Orphic cosmogony. Both the description of the gaze as the vehicle of the physical power of erotic desire, and the comparison with the annihilating effect of sleep and death, belong to the diction of contemporary erotic poetry: forms of this *melos* expressing the most urgent amorous desire are found both in Sappho and in Anakreon (Calame (2009a) 23–60 = 1999 13–38). The use in ritualized poetry of such expressions and metaphors confirms an asymmetrical relationship of erotic homophilia: in the partheneion we hear of the relations between the adolescent chorus-members and a chorus-leader arriving at mature feminine beauty. The homophilia also confirms the ritual character and initiatory function of choral songs intended for public musical performance. Was the poem composed for the celebration of the Hyakinthia, recalling the

homoerotic relationship that legend weaves between the young god Apollo and the adolescent hero Hyakinthos? Or was its intended setting to be beside the sanctuary of the Leukippidai to honour the future wives of the Dioskouroi? The very fragmentary state of the text that has come down to us unfortunately does not allow a clear decision.

The light shed by the latter poem on the character of the partheneia, at the same time erotic, ritual, and partly public, has often been overlooked in recent decades. Analyses, especially in literary terms, have focused on what has been misleadingly called the ‘first *Partheneion*’ of Alkman. Known to philologists from 1863, through the publication of a papyrus in the Louvre known as the ‘Papyrus Mariette’, this separate poem, again fragmentary, is made up of ten or so strophes in trochaic and dactylic metre. The main point of this undeniably choral song is melic praise of two young women. The name of the first shows her function: Hagesichora ‘she who leads the chorus’ is the *chorēgos* of the choral group singing the poem. As for the second young woman, the fact that her name is Agido perhaps connects her to the Agiad family, one of the two families holding royal power at Sparta, by means of a root on which the names of several kings of Lakedaimon are formed (see Calame (1977) II.46–51 and 140–2).

The semantic cohesion of the central part of the poem, which draws on the poetics of praise, is provided essentially by two semantic threads that organise values and metaphors. The first of these threads focuses on the luminous brilliance of erotic feminine beauty; the second deals with the different dimensions of the double education given at Sparta to girls: foot-races and the arts of the Muses in the choral group.

For my part I sing of the light of Agido

that I see rising like the sun;

she entreats it to appear for us.

But the illustrious chorus-leader does not let me

address to her either praise or blame.

She seems truly to carry distinction herself

as if, in the middle of a troop of mares,

one let loose a sturdy charger,

winner in the games,

with ringing gallop,

a horse worthy of winged dreams.

But do you not see?

On one side the Venetic steed,

on the other the locks of my companion

Hegesichora flower

like pure gold.

Her face of silver,

why tell you of it in its full light?

It is Hagesichora.

Agido, second in beauty, runs with her,

like a Kolaxean horse beside an Ibenian mare.⁹

Thus, on the one hand, we have a first young woman distinguished by a gleam of beauty like that of the sun at the moment of its rising; on the other, there is the chorus-leader whose face and hair call to mind the dull light of silver mixed with the dappled and blooming brilliance of gold. Through a series of equestrian comparisons, of which the first reminds us of the *Iliad*, the young woman taking on the role of chorus-leader seems drawn into a movement that underlines the brilliance of her beauty. This movement culminates in the race that explicitly brings into contrast the dazzling Hagesichora and the beautiful Agido. By a process of accumulating metaphors that is frequent in melic poetry, the two young women are then compared to doves. For us the comparison goes back to Homeric poetry: there it refers to the light passage through the air of a goddess, when in legend the Pleiades are the maidens who rouse desire in Orion while at the same time trying to escape his amorous pursuit – before being metamorphosed by Zeus into a constellation. Echoing the rising of the sun instigated by the luminous appearance of Agido at the beginning of the previous strophe, the two young women are shown ‘rising in the ambrosial night like the star Sirius’. The poetic ring-structure here underlines the singular brilliance attributed to Sirius while emphasizing the motion of the two young women in taking off into flight, ‘battling’ in their race like rival mares; the word ‘indeed’ (*gar*) that opens the concluding verses of the strophe puts the equestrian comparisons in the race into formal, logical relation with the aerial movement of the doves. The young woman whom the chorus-members praise in the *other* partheneion of Alkman, the one analysed above, is herself compared in her course on the public space to ‘a star that crosses the sparkling heaven’.¹⁰ While the girls of the chorus sing and dance the present poem, the two young women whom the chorus-members are praising are engaged in a race: we thus find, acted out, the two elements of Spartan musical and gymnastic education.

In the following strophe (lines 64–77) the young chorus-members refer to

themselves in the third person according to the technique of poetic 'signature'. Throughout this *sphragis* (literally, 'seal') which is repeated eight times, they list the items of finery that they do not yet possess, probably because they are still adolescents and do not yet rouse erotic desire. Indeed from the purple garment to the Lydian mitre ('ornament of maidens with a gaze of violet'), and to the finely chiselled bracelet of gold, all the finery mentioned recalls the power of Eros. But apart from the allusion to the locks of Nanno or to the charm of Ianthemis, it is on the gaze, vehicle of erotic desire, that this strophe is centred. The conclusion, however, is: 'but it is Hagesichora who is pursuing me' (line 77).

The following strophe (lines 78–91) is again explanatory. These lines show the reasons, ritual in nature, which justify, at the end of the strophe, the use of a verb denoting overwhelming erotic pressure. It signals the effect that the gaze of the chorus-leader provokes in the chorus-members. Along with Agido, Hagesichora celebrates a ritual very probably corresponding to the race already described in the comparison with the mares. The reference to the joint action of the two young women brings from the chorus-members a double address: first, in general terms, they ask the gods to accept the offering of the two young women, and then they address the chorus-leader herself. This address to Hagesichora in her role as leader of the choral group causes a slippage in the semantic thread, from feminine beauty to the beauty of the voice in song. If the chorus-members can only sing their heads off like an owl, the chorus-leader has a voice almost as melodious as those of the Siren-goddesses. And these two themes come together in the last strophe that is legible for us (lines 92–101): here the poetic eulogy compares the song of the chorus-leader to that of the swan, and then praises her locks that inspire desire. A double comparison with the lead horse and with the captain of a ship defines the position of Hagesichora: she alone can intervene with the goddess Aotis to free the chorus-members from the 'penalties' (line 88). This refers, no doubt, to the physical discipline to which choral and initiatory education subjects the young chorus-members.

In its alternation – shared with choral melic poetry – of the forms of *I* and of *we*, the praise-poem is carried along by a continuous and marked process of expression. In its 'self-referential' dimension it develops the theme of the arts of the Muses and therefore of the singing voice; it leads us from the initial affirmation of the laudatory part of the poem ('For my part I sing of the light of Agido': lines 39–40) to the allusion, for us final (and fragmentary), to the song of the adolescent girls (line 99). Its striking moments are the following: the vision, by the poetic *I*, of Agido bearing witness to the sunrise 'for us', the allusion to the poetry of praise and blame for the initial praise of Agido, the rhetorical question with *you* on the visual perception of the brilliance of Hagesichora's beauty, the reference with *we* to the ritual wearing of a veil destined for the goddess Orthria, the negative erotic wishes opening onto the

focus on Hagesichora, the disparagement of a voice that has not yet reached maturity, and finally the desire to please the goddess Aotis. Carried along also by the semantic thread of the (choral) song, the (enunciatory) course of the partheneion is punctuated by 'self-referential' allusions to gestures of a ritual nature (on this dramatization by visual means see especially Peponi (2004) 296–307).

Here is a rite, but also a 'myth' because, at the end of the part of the prelude lost to us, Alkman's partheneion opens out into the narration of a heroic story, probably presented in two sections. In a first phase of *praeteritio*, the trope of mentioning what is 'not' to be the focus, the poetic *I* presents the catalogue of the sons of Hippokoon. Half-brother of Tyndareos, their father had displaced the king to take his power, but the civilizing hero Herakles intervened; killing Hippokoon and several of his sons, and restoring Tyndareos to the throne of the city. The text of the poem is very fragmentary, but there is reason to think that Alkman adapted the version of this ancient tale on the history of Lakedaimonian royalty to suit not only the context of the poem's ritual performance but also the sex and age of the chorus-members who were singing it. A Spartan poet, Alkman thus belongs in the Greek poetic tradition of constant reshaping and recreating of foundation myths of cities, to achieve, in ritualized poetry, political and emotional effect through adjustment to particular circumstances of history, culture and religion.

On the one hand, the 'mythological' section of the poem has an intervention by Pollux and probably his brother Kastor, the paradigms for young Spartan citizens: the Dioskouroi no doubt played a part in the struggle against the Hippokoontidai to restore the royal power of their father Tyndareos. On the other hand, a scholiast adds, while mentioning Alkman, that one version of the story presented the Hippokoontidai as rivals of the Tyndaridai as suitors. This amorous rivalry in marriage would explain the gnomic conclusion that the young chorus-members draw from this first story: 'Let no one among men aspire to heaven, let none try to marry Aphrodite mistress [of Cyprus]' (lines 16–18). As for the second story, a comparison of such words as are legible on the papyrus with the poem of Pindar already mentioned allows the identification in these lines of a remarkable version of the struggle of the Tyndaridai against the Apharetidai over the daughters of Leukippos.¹¹ The example of marriage of the Dioskouroi with the White Mares would obviously be welcome in the mouths of the girls singing a partheneion; all the more so when the poem constructs erotic beauty by supporting its semantic cohesion with numerous equestrian comparisons. Thus, once more, in the tradition of melic poetry in its different forms, a proverbial formula ensures the passage from 'story' to 'speech', from the sung narrative of the foundation *arkhaia* (lit. 'antiquities') of Spartan royalty to the 'self-referential' description of the ritual action that the singing of the poem represents; 'There is a vengeance of the gods. Blessed is he who weaves the cloth of his days

without tears' (lines 36–9).

Orthria? Aotis? Goddess of the morning? Goddess of the dawn? To which divinity are the chorus-members addressing themselves as they sing the partheneion using apparently only two of her *epiklēseis* ('forms of address')? A brief scholion in the margin of the *Papyrus Mariette* has singularly complicated this question by glossing *Orthriai* by *Orthiai* (and *pharos* by *arotron*). Thus not only does the ritual offering of a veil or a cloak, to be expected for a female divinity, become the more surprising offering of a plough, but, above all, the Goddess of the Morning is transformed into one of the central figures of the Spartan pantheon. In fact it is only in texts and in late inscriptions of the Roman period that the goddess Orthia is designated under the name that has made her famous, as Artemis Orthia. Situated on the west bank of the Eurotas in a place whose name shows that it was marshy, while indicating its proximity to the settlement of Limnai, the sanctuary of Orthia played host to the bloody ritual of the whip (see this work Volume 2, [Chapter 20](#)). In addition one of the versions of the story of the abduction of the very young Helen by the Athenian Theseus, 'the most plausible' according to Plutarch, locates the seizure of the girl in the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia. According to a dramatic setting common in the tales of kidnapping of nymphs, Helen as a young girl was then taking part in a choral dance for the goddess; she was later freed by her brothers the Dioskouroi.¹² Unfortunately no fragment of Alkman refers to Orthia and only a single gloss reports under the name of the Spartan poet the expression 'servant of Artemis' (fr. 54 Page-Davies = 120 Calame; see also fr. 173 Page-Davies = ⁰263 Calame).

However that may be, Helen is famous for the matt sheen of a sparkling beauty that speaks of her birth from the egg of Leda. So she is the best candidate to be the recipient of a poem singing, in its dappled light, of the beauty of two young Spartan girls leaving adolescence to reach the erotic maturity of the adult.¹³ Helen was in fact the object of two cults at Sparta. Thus, on the one hand, she had a sanctuary in the neighbourhood of Platanistas; Pausanias (3.15.2–3) tells us that it was beside the tomb erected for Alkman himself, no doubt raised to the status of hero. There is every reason to believe that between Dromos and Plane Tree Island, reserved for the races of young men and of girls and for the ritual combats of future soldiers, Helen was venerated at the site marked by the young as an adolescent heroine. Apart from the references in Aristophanes and Euripides to the choral dances of which Helen is the chorus-leader, this idea is confirmed by the aetiological account picked up by Theokritos in his *Epithalamion to Helen* (18.38–8). He recounts the creation, by the young companions of the heroine, of a cult celebrating the end of Helen's adolescence; the maiden is on the point of marrying Menelaos and of thus arriving at the status of *numphē* ('young wife, bride'). This homage, paid to the grace of the heroine's beauty as she arrives at the threshold of adulthood, will be marked by the girls' race, by the offering

of a garland of flowers picked in a meadow that evokes the power of Eros, and by a libation of oil for anointing beside a plane tree destined to carry henceforth the name of the graceful young woman.

On the other hand, farther up the Eurotas, on the ‘Mycenaean’ site of Therapne, Helen was worshipped as goddess and as adult beside her husband Menelaos. An anecdote mentioned by Herodotos (6.61–2) about the king Ariston (mid sixth century) relates this cult of Helen to the bloom of feminine beauty favoured by Aphrodite. Responding to the repeated prayers of the nurse of a Spartan child not favoured by nature, Helen agreed to make of the ugliest of the city’s children ‘the most beautiful of women’. Just as Helen was taken by Paris from her husband Menelaos, so the young wife of a noble Spartan was seized by the king of the city, Ariston, whom her extreme beauty had seduced. Thus Helen when worshipped as heroine at the first shrine, at Platanistas, is still close to virginal Artemis; but Helen worshipped at the second shrine, at Therapne, as goddess, is a wife possessed of the charms of beauty in full bloom and seems to be the incarnation of Aphrodite, capable of amorous seduction and martial destruction.¹⁴ And it is in this tension between female adolescence and fully-fledged beauty that the partheneion of Alkman unfolds, both in its narrative section and in its ritual part, in the interlacing of the two semantic lines of erotic beauty and musical voice.

In this connection a line of Alkman is noteworthy, pronounced by a female poetic *I*, in performative manner. The *I* in question addresses a prayer to a divinity identifiable as Hera, while wearing a crown of ‘immortelles and delicate cyperus’ (D.A. Campell’s translation has: ‘a garland of goldflower and lovely galingale’). Ornament or offering, this recalls the garland mentioned in the first of our two partheneia. We may link this probable female address to Hera with the sacrifice that, again according to Pausanias, Spartan mothers offered, on the occasion of the marriage of their daughters, to an ancient wooden statue of Aphrodite-Hera, located to the north of the city’s acropolis. The cyperus (galingale?) flower appears again in another fragment of Alkman that has Eros intervene instead of Aphrodite in the game of love, and in another couple of lines Eros again is put under the power of his mistress Kypris when, with his warm flow, he warms the heart of a poetic *I* who could as easily be male as female.¹⁵ Whether in partheneia or other melic forms, Alkman’s poetry belongs in the great tradition of erotic melic verse, devoted – in Sappho – to the cult of Aphrodite, and – in Anakreon – to the ritual and political pleasures of the banquet.

7.5 Alkman at the Banquet: The ‘*Syssitia*’

Some fragments of Alkman could be extracts from banquet songs, such as the fragment in dactylic tetrameters taken from the third book of the Alexandrian

edition. In a form of signature (*sphragis*) the poet appears under his own name, in the third person, ready to partake of a shared gruel, the one favoured by the people (fr. 17 Page-Davies = 9 Calame, quoted by Athenaeus 10.416cd and discussed by Nannini (1988) 19–35). Nothing in the few lines transmitted by Athenaeus allows us to connect this declaration of popular poetics with the famous ritual and political Spartan banquets known as *syssitia*. The latter are mentioned only for the classical period, for instance by Herodotos (1.65.5), who nonetheless attributes them to the legendary lawgiver Lykourgos. Expressed by the poetic *I* with a form of intentional future tense, the probable preliminary offering of a tripod could refer to the ritual gesture that accompanied the singing of the poem at the meal. Comparing a fragment of Bacchylides (fr. 21 Maehler) praising a simple meal washed down with wine, we might identify the context of Alkman's poem as a *theoxenia* ('welcoming gods as guests') reserved for those local heroes the Tyndaridai. On the other hand, from yet another poem (fr. 98 Page-Davies = 129 Calame) comes the advice to 'strike up the paian, in the banquets and the choral gatherings, among the table-companions of the *andreia*'. These 'meals of men': a technical term, used at Sparta and on Crete, it refers unambiguously to the *syssitia*, communal banquets bringing together at Sparta the different categories of citizen-soldier (see Aristotle *Politics* 2.1271a.32–8). In addition to likely banquet songs, the musical performance of the paian reinforced the ritual and religious character of these civic gatherings. A poet such as Alkman contributed to them not only by composing songs but also by participating in the ceremony itself. That is what seems to be indicated by yet another fragment in which, under the appearance of a 'signature', Alkman himself appears, in the third person, to present himself as the organizer of the meal (fr. 116 Page-Davies = 128 Calame).

Alkman is composer of songs, master of ceremonies, but also chorus-master, particularly for the ritual performance of the partheneia – for such is the role that an Alexandrian commentator attributed to him. In this commentary, which links the name of Alkman to the Hyakinthia, and which discusses a poetic fragment (Aeschylus fr. dub. 489 Radt) mentioning the settlement of Amyklai 'beside the Eurotas' (see earlier), the learned interpreter states that 'at that time the Lakedaimonians appointed (the poet), him who was Lydian, as master (*didaskalos*) of the girls and of the ephebes for the ancestral choruses (*patriois chorois*)' (fr. 10 (a) Page-Davies = test. 5.30–4 Calame). Elsewhere other commentaries on the poems of Alkman refer to choral groups made up either of Dymainai or of Pitanatides. Now, the first of these names refers in the feminine form to one of the three Dorian tribes that made up the Spartan community, and the second relates to one of the four *ōbai*, that is to say one of the four Spartan villages forming a city that had not yet – unlike Athens – undergone a process of synoikism (references in Calame (2001) 58–9, 154–6, and 219–21). Moreover, the commentary that attributes to Alkman the function of *chorodidaskalos* also interprets a poem addressed to a certain

Agesidamos, ‘chorus-leader beloved of the gods’ (fr. 10 (b) Page-Davies = 82 a and b Calame). Because of his personal name this ‘illustrious’ son of Damotimos could belong to the royal family of the Eurypontids in which this name is particularly well represented. The same poem presents yet another reference to the Dymainai, in connection with the Tyndaridai, and the poetic *we* represents itself as close to nobles and charming chorus-leaders, ‘young men of the same age, pleasant, with neither beard nor moustache’. Along with the partheneia, Alkman had therefore certainly composed, perhaps on the occasion of the Gymnopaidiai, ritual songs intended to be performed by choral groups of adolescent boys. In addition, a poem commented on in another papyrus, and equally carried by a poetic and choral *we*, sings of the blonde daughter (of Polydoros?). The commentator adds that she is Timasimbrotā, in fact the daughter of Eurykrates, who is the fifteenth king of the Agiad dynasty; as for Polydoros the learned Alexandrian seems rather to wish to identify him with the son of Leotychidas the First, the contemporary king of the Eurypontid dynasty at the end of the seventh century (Fr. 5.2, col. I.1–22 Page-Davies = 80 Calame; on this genealogical puzzle see Calame (1983) 434–7).

In the partheneia, the paians (as they probably are), the poems for the symposion, the songs intended for the *syssitia* (or for the forms of citizen gathering that preceded the invention of *syssitia*), and the songs for different great Spartan civic and ritual celebrations, a poet such as Alkman, the Lydian settled at Sparta, was in the service of his adopted city, of its institutions and of its cults. He contributed to the development of a remarkable musical culture, notably in all aspects of the education, ritual and initiatory, directed to the adolescents, girls and boys.

7.6 Tyrtaios the Citizen-Soldier and Elegiac Paraenesis

We now turn to the heart of the Spartan community: to adult citizens, young soldiers or husbands, of different social standing, summoned to approve of political leadership by the two kings and the five ephors and to serve in the army. In this context the great Spartan musical tradition had another famous representative, initiator of a poetic tradition often celebrated, especially in classical Athens.

Preceding Alkman probably by less than a generation, Tyrtaios lived at Sparta at the time of the second Messenian War and, in the ancient tradition, he owes his reputation to his ‘war songs’ (*melē polemistēria*). Known equally as ‘marching songs’ (*embatēria*), these poems were composed in the cadenced rhythm given by the anapaestic metre; their performance was accompanied by

the double oboe, as is shown in contemporary iconography and as Plutarch also says in his *Life of Lykourgos* (21.4: see also *Inst. Lac.* 16). ‘Laconian poems’ par excellence, some of these martial songs would have been preserved till Plutarch’s day, i.e. until the Roman Empire. Sung by the soldiers on campaign, these musical poems were intended to set the rhythm for the advance of the phalanx, maintaining the cohesion of a formation to which we shall return. But the major part of Tyrtaios’ production, collected in five papyrus rolls by the Alexandrian editors, is composed in elegiac distichs. With its diction close to, but distinct from, that of Homeric narrative poetry, the form of the elegy is in general that of didactic and paraenetic (‘advisory’) poetry: it aims to train those to whom it is addressed by counsel and exhortation. That is the reason why, in addition to the poem *Eunomia* devoted to the constitution that regulates the political life of the Lakedaimonians, the considerable collection of elegiac compositions transmitted under the name of Tyrtaios also has the title of ‘elegiac counsels’ (*hupothēkai di’elegeias*); the same is true of the collection of poems attributed to Solon (other evidence in Prato (1968) 5*–8*).

Of these sequences of elegiac distichs designed to exhort, one good example has come down to us. When compared with the Homeric worldview, poetic and partly fictional, it reveals a historical and ideological change in the way warlike activity was conceived, and in how it interacted with civic organization.

Come, take courage. You are truly of the race of Herakles
and Zeus has not yet bent his neck.

Do not fear the throng of soldiers, no panic,
but let each man hold his shield straight towards the first ranks.
Take the breath of life for your enemy and for friends
the goddesses of black death, more than the rays of the sun.

[...]

Come, let each man stay in his place, his legs spread,
set on his two feet, planted on the earth, gritting his teeth and biting his lips,
hiding in the hollow of his wide shield
his thighs, his greaves, his chest, his shoulders.

With his right hand let him brandish a sturdy sword,
on his head let him wave the crest of his helmet, threatening.
In the powerful violent action let him learn the trade of war
and let him not try to evade the darts – he has a shield.

But, body against body, let him strike and wound the enemy,
with his long spear or his sword
legs against legs, shield against shield,
crest beside crest, the helmet set on the helmet,
chest against chest, let him fight the enemy and strike him,
clutching the grip of his sword or of his long lance.

We can identify the strategy urged by this series of elegiac distichs in its skilfully orchestrated rhetoric (fr. 11.1–6 and 21–34 West = fr. 8.1–6 and 21–34 Gentili-Prato). The *we* of cultic poetry gives place, in these verses of military encouragement, to *you* (plural) which in turn is transformed into a more general *tis* ('any man who ...'). In a form of expression peculiar to the poetry of exhortation, the instructions formulated by the poet are addressed to the *neoi* ('young men', called on in line 10) who are newly integrated into the phalanx, and then are probably directed to the whole phalanx, to every soldier in it, if not to the community of citizens. The poet appeals to the phalanx for cohesion and solidarity in resistance, for mastery of self and contempt of blood and death. The little lead figures dedicated in the sanctuary of (Artemis) Orthia (this volume, [Chapter 6](#)) give an idea both of the physical appearance of the hoplite equipment mentioned by Tyrtaios and of how far Sparta had moved from the heroic ideology of death in combat found in the *Iliad*. These figures also frequently represent musicians, showing the variety of sung performances in Sparta. From the poetical point of view, this remodelling of epic ideology is shown by the complete reshaping of Homeric diction (Giannini (1979) *passim*), readapted moreover to the elegiac metre and to the poetics of 'paraenesis' and exhortation.

Hoplite tactics varied at different places and times, and they should not be seen as an exact reflection of a civic community. A *polis* – unlike, it might seem, a phalanx – did not involve social homogeneity or political equality. However, the hoplite phalanx did help to define the civic identity of the first Greek *poleis*. The hoplite order has thus become the emblem of Greek civic organization, of power shared in a fairly even fashion, in contrast to the absolute rule exercised by a barbarian monarch over an unorganized mob.¹⁶ It was the technical invention of the round shield that permitted or established hoplite tactics, probably shortly before Tyrtaios' intervention at Sparta; through acquiring this shield, free men who did not belong to the great aristocratic families of horsemen gained a new status as citizens. Aristotle, later, clearly grasped this. In his view, Greece first had monarchies which were military in origin with cities dominated by horsemen; later, the growth of the cities brought about an increase in the number of infantrymen carrying hoplite equipment. Changes in military function brought changes in political power, in this case an increase in the number of citizens engaged in the

running of the city (*politeia*), a system which early Athenians called ‘democracy’. In Aristotle’s words, ‘only those who have acquired arms participate in the *politeia*’ (*Politics* 4, 1297b 16–28 and 1278b 2–3).

Solidarity of phalanx was essential. If a phalanx broke or became disorderly – perhaps because some of its hoplites turned and ran – it became, in Aristotle’s word, ‘useless’. The martial poetry of praise and blame accordingly preached against flight. The poet, in moralizing tone, points to the shame represented by a corpse lying in the dust with a sword planted in its *back*. In the elegiac poem quoted above, the final address to the light-armed troops (helots?) follows that addressed to the *neoi*. It suggests that the poem composed by Tyrtaios was sung either in public, or on the battlefield before the fighting began. The later Athenian historian Philochoros reported that, during the wars fought for control of neighbouring Messenia, the Lakedaimonians followed the ‘strategy’ of Tyrtaios; they established the custom of singing verses of his at symposia and performing paianes in the prelude to battle. However that may be, for hoplites in phalanx and for informal troops in support, it was still solidarity that counted. A reference to such mutual aid seems to be made by an expression borrowed from the *Iliad*: *allothen allos* (‘one from one side, one from another’, in line 35 of our poem). According to the Athenian orator Lykourgos the elegiac verses of Tyrtaios were recited before the soldiers gathered beside the tent of the Spartan king, who was also the general. For the Athenian orator of the fourth century these songs have become a means of education in courage and a source of authoritative appeals to be willing to die for the fatherland.¹⁷

A very similar assertion of the need for hoplite solidarity is set out in another poem, a fine (and rare) surviving example of poetic tradition at the symposion. This poem, forty-four lines long (in the form that has reached us), is quoted and used twice by Plato in the *Laws* (1.660e–661a and 629a–630b = Tyrtaios test. 23 and 60 Gentili-Prato), with reference to the ‘very divine poet’. The verses are cited as an example of poetic skill, and of excellence in praising those who distinguish themselves in war against a foreign enemy (*not* in civil war). Before Plato, some of these distichs had already been included in the collection known as the *Theognidea* (1003–1006 = 13–16 and 935–938 = 37–40). So from the fifth century, if not earlier, groups of elegiac distichs were circulating in the symposia of the *hetaireiai* (private gatherings of wealthy men, oligarchic in tone); they were presented to the citizen-*hetairoi* (lit. ‘companions’), as poetic incitement to respect traditional civic values. The variations seen in these verses no doubt reflect the fact that, in symposia, distichs attributed to Tyrtaios were constantly reused (see Bowie (1986) 15–21).

The second part of this long elegiac sequence is devoted to the ‘gnomic’ mode of proverb, to the brief, freestanding, generalization: ‘brave in war is the man who’ (fr. 12.16–44 West = 9.16–44 Gentili-Prato). The deployment of moral

definition, in the form of a proverb, was widely practised in the symposium; traces of such poetic play survive in the poetry of Sappho and in the shorter Socratic dialogues of Plato. Tyrtaios in this mode praises the merits of the hoplite: he risks his life, standing firm in the front ranks and encouraged by the words of his neighbour not to take flight. Two outcomes are envisaged for the outstanding warrior. Either he falls among those fighting in the front ranks, the file-leaders of the phalanx, and he thus contributes to the glory of his city, of his fellow-citizens, and of his father; honoured by the whole city, his memory is kept alive, around his tomb, by his descendants who thereby contribute to his immortalization. Or he escapes death and, victorious, is honoured throughout his life, the object of the respect of the *neoi*, his contemporaries, and of the old men. To the heroic honours enjoyed in the Homeric poems by great warriors fallen on the battlefield are thus added the marks of respect of the different groups making up the civic community.

But this new heroic glory, maintained by the community, would be nothing without poetic and musical memory. That is why the definition of the man of courage is preceded by a strong declaratory statement. Perhaps as an introduction to the work, the poetic *I* uses the form of negative catalogue known as *praeteritio* ('not mentioning'), to introduce and put forward his own definition of courage (*aretē*). Thus, in negative form, he illustrates his ideas by a list of legendary figures showing the qualities that his definition will *not* accept (fr. 12.1–5 West = 9.1–15 Gentili-Prato):

I should not wish to mention nor to praise in my words a man
for the vigour of his legs, nor for his worth in wrestling,
whether he have the size and strength of the Kyklopes
or he be able to outdo Boreas of Thrace
or he have still greater charm than Tithonios in his beauty
or he be richer than Midas and Kinyras combined
or he be a greater king than Pelops son of Tantalos
or he have a voice more melodious than that of Adrastos,
if he be reputed for everything if it is not for strength in combat.
Truly a man is of no value in war
if he does not stand the sight of blood spreading
and does not face the enemy while holding his line.
That is excellence; that is the best and finest prize
for a young man to win, among mortal men.
It is a common good for all the city, for all the people.

None of the mythical heroic figures cited offers the required form of excellence. Neither brute force nor erotic beauty nor wealth nor royal power nor yet athletic merit will do: only martial ardour. The basis of *aretē*, strength in combat, is no longer that demonstrated individually by the noble protagonists of the Trojan War with their duels; instead, military excellence has become a *xunon esthlon*, a ‘common good’, equally shared by the citizen-soldiers of a politically-advanced Sparta.¹⁸ Local mythical figures, such as the Dioskouroi and the Hippokoontidai which appear in the *Partheneia* of Alkman, give way in the poem of Tyrtaios to broadly panhellenic heroic figures. That reflects the cultural and musical attraction of a city which could draw poets from afar, poets who brought musical innovations but also the mythological traditions shared by other Greek cities.

7.7 A Political Culture of Musical Performance

Tyrtaean elegy can also be directly political, as in these famous lines, known in several versions and certainly extracted from the *Eunomia* cited by Aristotle (Tyrtaios fr. 4.1–6 West = 1b and 14.1–6 Gentili-Prato; cf. Aristotle *Politics* 5.1306b.22–7 = Tyrtaios test. 7 Gentili-Prato):

After having heard the voice of Phoibos, they carried home from Delphi

The oracles of the god and his words of authority:

That the kings honoured by the gods institute the council,

They who care for the lovely city of Sparta,

Likewise the elders, advanced in age;

And then that those of the people reply with straight words ...

The dual kingship, gerousia, assembly of the people: the defining words put into the mouth of Apollo list the institutions of the Spartan state (except that the ephors are not mentioned): the state was established by the *rhētra*, the founding (and controversial) speech attributed to the law-giver and founder-hero Lykourgos.¹⁹ The poem was probably sung in public (see Bowie (1986) 30–1), perhaps on the occasion of the new distribution of land required by the conquest of Messenia, according to the hypothesis formulated by Aristotle in the passage just cited. Alternatively, and according to a very late reference (Tzetzes *Chiliades* 692–5 = Tyrtaios test. 20 Gentili-Prato), it was accompanied by the pyrrhic that set the rhythm for the singing of the ‘laws of Lykourgos’. The elegiac poem associates poet and public with the founding history of the present city: ‘Zeus, son of Kronos, husband of Hera of the

lovely crown, has given this city (*tēnde polin*) to the Herakleidai with whom we [n.b.] left windy Erineos to land on the vast island of Pelops.’ Political in nature, the elegiac poem is both narrative and exhortative. Based on the ‘mythical’ history of the city (and perhaps on its recent history: cf. fr. 5 West = 2-4 Gentili-Prato) it engages with political action in the present (see Aloni and Iannucci (2007) 129–30). The *Eunomia* of Tyrtaios implies that the political circumstances of its utterance may have been similar to those applying in Athens, where the lawgiver and poet Solon (early sixth century) similarly urged – in verse – morality of his own in a voice of poetic authority.

Whether melic or choral, whether elegiac or didactic, whether given a ritual and cultic performance or uttered in public in secular context or privately in banquets, Spartan poetry shaped the social life of the Lakedaimonians, both men and women. Both its extraordinary flowering in the seventh and sixth centuries, and its role in creation of the social bond, are to be set in parallel with the development, during this same period, of the plastic arts. Laconian pottery, refined iconography and sophisticated bronze-work all enjoyed wide diffusion in the Greek world (see Pipili 1987; also [Chapter 5](#) by Pipili and [Chapter 6](#) by Prost in this volume). To that can be added the remarkably successful participation of Spartan athletes in the Olympic Games (see Christesen, [Chapter 21](#), this work), which demonstrates not only the development at Sparta of an agonistic culture of athletic activity but also the opening of the city to panhellenic celebrations.

Classical Greek culture has been defined as a ‘song culture’ (John Herington), that of the (dubiously-named) ‘archaic’ period as a ‘Chorkultur’ (Anton Bierl). Pre-classical Sparta of the seventh and sixth centuries, and important aspects of the community no doubt surviving into the classical period, appear as a political culture of musical and ritual performance.

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NOTES

- 1 On the 'mirage spartiate' see Ollier, 1933, 139–94, and, for example, Powell, this volume [Chapter 1](#). See Nafissi, this volume, [Chapter 4](#) (with a full bibliography); on the legendary figure of Lykourgos and on the refounding measures attributed to him; also, and especially, Cartledge, 2001, 169–84.
- 2 See the reading proposed and the bibliographical references given by Calame, 2004, 162–72.
- 3 The numerous pieces of evidence on the activity of Terpanndros on Lesbos are collected with a fitting commentary by Gostoli 1990, XI–XV, 79–82, and 116–23: on the controversial questions of the origin of Alkman and the dating of his career at Sparta see Calame 1983, XIV–XVI and 357–58.
- 4 See Richer, this volume, [Chapter 20](#). Xenophon, *Lak. Pol.*, 2.1, who does not yet use the technical term *agōgē*, and Plutarch, *Life of Lykourgos*, 16.7–14; cf. Lipka 2002a, 114–17, and Ducat 2006, 69–118 and 281–331;

see also Calame 1999a, 289–95, and 2009b, 283–4.

- 5 See Ps.-Plutarch, *De Musica* 8–10, 12, and 28 with the commentary of Lasserre 1955, 158–160 and 170–1; Pindar (fr. 140b Maehler = Xenokritos test. 1 Fileni) sang of Xenokritos of Lokroi.
- 6 Fr. 45 Page-Davies = 113 Calame and fr. 46 Page-Davies = 114 Calame; see also the observation in the *De Musica* (14, 1136a) assigned to Plutarch on the excellence of the melic poems of Alkman, who is said to have attributed the playing of the flute to Apollo himself: fr. 51 Page-Davies = 219 Calame; cf. Calame 1983, 508–10 and 614.
- 7 Fr. 52 Page-Davies = 213 Calame: cf. Calame 1983, 411–12, on the different foundation legends of the cult practised for Apollo at Sparta. Two fragments of Alkman (fr. 49 Page-Davies = 115 Calame and fr. 50 (a) Page-Davies = 116 Calame) mention an Apollo Lykeios whose cult is not otherwise attested at Sparta; on the other hand the late evidence, perhaps mistaken, of Himerios (*Speeches* 39.2 = test. 29 Calame) indicates by implicit allusion to the double origin of the poet that Alkman coordinated the songs of Lydia with the Dorian ‘lyre’, and that he introduced to Sparta songs in honour of Zeus Lykaeos (whose cult is attested only in Arkadia: cf. Calame 1983, 510–12).
- 8 On the question of choral ‘self-referentiality’ presented on the Athenian stage, see the fundamental study of Henrichs 1994/95, with my further observations set out in 1999b, 126–32.
- 9 Alkman fr. 1.39–59 Page-Davies = 3.39–59 Calame: as for the values attributed to the different mares in these verses, whose syntactical interpretation is controversial, I refer to my commentary of 1983, 324–32; see now Tsantsanoglou 2012, 50–63.
- 10 For the history of the interpretation of the comparison with the Pleiades, in turn seen as a reference to the name of a rival chorus or to the constellation of the Pleiades, see Calame 1977, II 7–77. See also now Tsantsanoglou 2012, 63–70.
- 11 According to the intelligent suggestion made by Gengler 1995, 4–18, involving a convincing comparison with the story in Pindar *Nemean* 10.60–72; on the other hand Ferrari 2008, 53 and 57 tries with some difficulty to find in it a version of the relations of Phaethon with Aphrodite.
- 12 See Xenophon, *Lak. Pol.* 2.9 and Plutarch *Life of Theseus* 31.1–3, referring to particularly to Hellanikos *FGrHist* 323a F 18; as for the history and the functions of the cult rendered to (Artemis) Orthia, I must refer to Calame 2001, 156–69 and 214–19. Both the metrical structure of the line concerned and the fact that in the seventh century the name of the goddess

is attested only in the form *Vorthasia* forbid correcting in the text *Orthriai* to (*V*)*orthiai*: see Calame 1977, I.199–21 and 1983 333.

- 13 On the goddess hymned in the ‘first’ partheneion, 1977, II.119–28; the question remains controversial: see the recent bibliography, with commentary, by Luginbill 2009, 48–54, who opts for Aphrodite; see also Bowie 2011, 62–65: Artemis and Apollo.
- 14 About the double cult that Helen received at Sparta see Calame 2001, 191–202.
- 15 Fr. 60 Page-Davies = 126 Calame; cf. fr. 3.65 Page-Davies = 26.65 Calame; see Calame 1983, 407 and 526–8, and also 1977, II.107–9. See also fr. 58 Page-Davies = 147 Calame and fr. 59 (a) Page-Davies = 148 Calame.
- 16 Among the very numerous recent works linking the structure of the phalanx to the political development of the city, see, for Sparta, Cartledge 2001, 153–66 (with numerous recent bibliographical references); see also Nafissi 1991, 124–38.
- 17 Philochoros *FGrHist* 328 F 216 = Tyrtaios test. 11 Gentili-Prato, and then Lykourgos *Against Leokrates* 106–7 = Tyrtaios test. 6 Gentili-Prato; on the circumstances of performance of Tyrtaios’ elegiac distichs cf. Murray 1991, 93–97; see also Meier 1998, 42–7 and 216–21.
- 18 See Snell 1965, 79–96, in relation to the civic values praised by other elegiac poets of the time of Tyrtaios; on ‘glorious death’ in combat see also the fr. 10 West = 6–7 Gentili-Prato, with the commentary and bibliographical references of Aloni and Ianucci 2007, 159–211.
- 19 On the heroic figure of Lykourgos and the constitution attributed to him by legendary tradition, see in this volume [Chapter 4](#), with the studies by Ogden 1994 and Musti 1996. The complex relationship between the line of Tyrtaios and the text of a law whose form is contested is the subject of the critical study by van Wees 1999, 17–25.

CHAPTER 8

Luxury, Austerity and Equality in Sparta

Hans van Wees

‘Everyone was a Lakonomaniac: they wore long hair, went hungry, got dirty, lived like Sokrates and carried their little sticks.’ The would-be Spartans mocked by Aristophanes (*Birds* 1281–3) are among our earliest evidence for a distinctive Spartan lifestyle, a thumbnail-sketch satirical version of the idealized figures studied and praised at length by Plutarch more than 500 years later. For Plutarch, too, Spartans lived harsh lives and were ‘like Sokrates’ in cultivating the virtues of restraint which marked true philosophers; his work has been instrumental in making ‘Spartan’ a byword for simplicity and austerity. Yet Plato and others portrayed the Spartans in very different light, as a people driven by greed, consumed by ‘a love of money’ which threatened to destabilize their society, and as owners of vast estates, countless slaves and livestock, and jealously hoarded piles of cash:

In the whole of Greece there is not as much gold and silver as is held in private hands in Sparta, because for many generations now it has gone into this country from all over Greece, and often also from the barbarians, yet nothing at all comes out again. Simply put, what the fox said to the lion in Aesop’s fable also applies to the coinage entering Sparta: ‘the tracks pointing in are clear, but no one can see them come out anywhere’.¹

How, when and why the Spartans combined the accumulation of great wealth with living lives of austerity are the questions addressed in this chapter and the next.

Recent scholarship has made great advances in unravelling the biases, distortions and inventions in our evidence on this subject; Stephen Hodkinson’s *Property and Wealth in Classical Sparta* (2000) in particular has offered a comprehensive, sophisticated and illuminating treatment of the relevant material. The main target of his and other critical studies has been the accounts of Sparta given by Plutarch in his *Life of Lykourgos* and *Sayings of Lykourgos* as well as in the set of notes known as *Instituta Laconica*. Plutarch credited the lawgiver Lykourgos, who in antiquity was dated to the early eighth century at the latest, with a radical equalization of property by means of the redistribution of land and abolition of gold and silver coinage, as well as a severe restriction of the display of wealth, mainly by means of imposing compulsory dining in austere public messes for all citizens.² It is now widely

accepted that equalization of property was a myth, never attempted in archaic or classical Sparta, and that restrictions on display, while real and significant, were neither as austere nor as ancient as Plutarch believed. Beyond this broad outline, however, there is little consensus either on the details of the property regime or on the nature and origins of the culture of austerity: it has been variously dated to the late seventh, mid-sixth or late sixth centuries, and according to many it was the result of militarization in response to external pressures, while others see it as primarily aimed at creating an egalitarian society in response to internal conflict.³

In what follows we shall analyse the ownership and display of wealth in Sparta, reserving the central institution of the public messes for separate discussion. The increasing concentration of landownership – partially halted by a major reform in 370/69 BC which has so far escaped scholarly notice – will emerge as a constant feature of Spartan history. The *acquisition* of wealth was not restricted, except for a few years after 404 BC when an unenforceable ban on private ownership of foreign coinage was imposed. The first signs of restraint in the *display* of wealth appeared c.600 BC as part of a reaction across the Greek world to increasing inequality and the development of ‘luxurious’ lifestyles, but the major movement towards a culture of austerity came at the end of the sixth century. It was then that a set of reforms, which came to be attributed to the legendary Lykourgos, restricted citizen rights to rentier landowners, excluding all who could not afford a leisured lifestyle, while at the same time regulating this lifestyle in order to ensure that it remained attainable for many and that economic inequality among citizens was masked. This system of ‘austerity’ lasted for two centuries, until the further concentration of wealth made it unsustainable.

8.1 The ‘Most Revolutionary’ Reform (Plut. *Lyk.* 8.1): Equality of Property

8.1.1 Redistribution of land

From the second century BC onwards, starting with Polybios, our sources say that one of the major features of Spartan society was that ‘no citizen may own more than another, but all must possess an equal share of the citizen territory’.⁴ Some scholars accept this claim of radical economic equality, but quite a few others reject it,⁵ and there is certainly much archaic and classical evidence to show that land ownership was in fact highly unequal.

In the late seventh century, Tyrtaios in his poem *Eunomia* opposed demands for a redistribution of land (fr. 1 West). Such demands would not have been

made unless serious inequality of wealth prevailed at the time and many citizens were falling into poverty. A few other snatches of poetry confirm that in the seventh century Sparta was seen as a community consumed by a dangerous 'love of wealth'.⁶ In the archaic period, the Spartans adopted a military solution to this problem: rather than redistribute land, they occupied new territory, conquering southern Lakonia, Messenia, and finally Kynouria around 550 BC. Further attempts were made in Arkadia, and in 515–510 BC in Libya and Sicily, but these failed.⁷ The land – and native labour force – of these regions might in theory have been divided equally, but it is more likely that Sparta applied the principle of relative equality, according to which each man's share should be, not absolutely equal, but 'fair' in proportion to his merit and status. This was the basis on which spoils of war were divided by Homer's heroes,⁸ and by the Spartans themselves after the battle of Plataia: the soldiers got 'as much as they deserved', the best men received 'selected prizes', and the commander took 'ten of everything' (Hdt. 9.81). Sparta's archaic conquests would thus have ensured that even the poorer citizens were relatively well off, but they would have done nothing to encourage equality of property.

Even if the initial distribution of conquered land had been absolutely equal, this division would not have lasted long. As Hodgkinson has demonstrated, under a system of partible inheritance, where property is shared between heirs, the simple fact that couples will have different numbers of children means that over only two generations complete equality of wealth will be transformed into a situation where 50 per cent of the population has 0.75 or less of their original equal share, while 25 per cent has 1.2 or more. If the men and women who inherit most property marry one another, rather than choose poorer partners, the change is even more dramatic: in just a single generation, 59 per cent of men will end up with 0.3–0.7 of the original unit and marry women who own no land under a regime of 'residual' female inheritance, while under 'universal' female inheritance, 63 per cent of men will inherit 0.2–0.5 of the original unit and add between 0.1–0.3 unit owned by their wives, producing at most 0.8 of the original property.⁹ The ancient notion that equality of property had lasted for as long as the normal rules of inheritance governed the ownership of land, but began to crumble in the fourth century as a result of legislation by the ephor Epitadeus, is thus clearly not tenable.¹⁰

In the classical period, Thucydides, Xenophon and Aristotle all assumed that there were 'poor' as well as 'rich' Spartans, and that equality was achieved through uniformity of lifestyle and some sharing of property, not through an equal division of land. Xenophon listed a number of conventions for borrowing and sharing to facilitate hunting, supposedly introduced by Lykourgos, and concluded: 'by sharing with each other in this way even those who own small properties partake of all the resources of the country when they need something' (*Lak. Pol.* 6.4). If this was the best evidence for

economic equality he could find, he cannot have had any notion that Lykourgos distributed the land equally. Accordingly, when he criticized contemporary Spartans for abandoning the lawgiver's system, a failure to maintain landed equality was not among his complaints (*Lak. Pol.* 14). In Aristotle's critical discussion of Sparta, 'inequality of property' was positively singled out as a major flaw in Lykourgos' legislation and a serious problem for Sparta where 'some own far too much property and others extremely little' (*Pol.* 1270a15–23). Specifically, Aristotle diagnosed this inequality as a major cause of the notorious decline of manpower in Sparta: those too poor to pay their mess contributions lost their citizenship (1271a27–38).¹¹

The notion that Lykourgos had divided Spartan territory equally amongst all citizens seems to have been formulated first in 243 BC, when inequality of wealth had become so severe that king Agis IV proposed a redistribution of land. He claimed that this was not a revolutionary change but in fact a return to the 'true' Lykourgan system (*Plut. Agis* 6–10). His proposal was never implemented, but an actual redistribution of land did take place under Kleomenes III and lasted for five years (227–222 BC) until a Macedonian intervention which 'restored' the old order (*Plut. Cleom.* 11; 30). The propaganda of these revolutionary movements clearly had a great impact on later portrayals of Lykourgos' reforms, and is surely responsible for the claims from Polybios onwards that an equal distribution of land had been made by Lykourgos, but that this original equality had been destroyed by the law of Epitadeus.¹²

It is quite surprising, however, that these new claims were so widely and uncritically accepted, given that the reforms were short-lived and that there was much hostility towards Agis and Kleomenes within and outside Sparta. One would have expected their propaganda to be largely ignored. Agis and Kleomenes also cancelled debts but this did not become an accepted feature of Lykourgos' reforms.¹³ One wonders, therefore, whether there was some precedent for the notion of an original equality of property even before the revolutions.

A strong indication that something did indeed change in Sparta's property regime much earlier is that the number of citizens stopped falling after 371 BC. In that year, 700 Spartiates aged 20–55 fought at the battle of Leuktra. It is almost certain that 300 of these men served in the king's guard, the *Hippeis*, while the remaining 400 served in the four regular infantry regiments (*morai*) which were present.¹⁴ This implies that Sparta's entire army of six regiments consisted of c.900 men aged 20–55, including the *Hippeis*. (In the unlikely event that the king's guard had been abolished by 371 BC, 700 Spartiates in four regiments would imply a total army of 1,050 men.) Adding citizens over the age of fifty-five – about 15 per cent of the adult male population¹⁵ – and a few under fifty-fives exempted from military service, we arrive at a total of 1,100 Spartiates (or at most 1,300) on the eve of Leuktra. In the battle, 400

citizens were killed, so that Spartiate numbers abruptly fell to 700 (or 900 at most). In 243 BC, the revolutionaries warned that Sparta had ‘only’ 700 citizens (Plut. *Agis* 5.4), so that numbers had apparently not fallen at all over a period of four generations (or at worst by 200, or 22 per cent). By contrast, in the century after the Persian Wars, the total number of citizens declined from at least 5,880 (see later) to 1,100–1,300, a drop of some 80 per cent. Something must have happened in or after 371 BC to halt (or at least radically slow down) the growing inequality of property which was the major structural cause of decline in manpower.

Stabilization of the number of citizens is all the more remarkable because there ought to have been a further steep drop in the aftermath of Leuktra. A year after the battle, Sparta lost control of Messenia, which amounted to two-thirds of its agricultural land.¹⁶ The average Spartan was thus left with only one-third of his previous landed wealth, and this should have produced another huge fall in citizen numbers. The crisis provoked civil conflict twice in quick succession; the second attempted coup explicitly involved a large number of Spartiates (Plut. *Ages*. 32.6). All we hear about the government’s response to these problems is that Agesilaos had the ‘conspirators’ executed without trial – reducing citizen numbers still further – but Xenophon implies that by 368 BC the army had been reorganized,¹⁷ and we must surely infer that social-economic reforms had taken place too, or else Sparta could not have sustained a citizen population of about 700, or indeed have continued to function at all.

A clue to the nature of these reforms is provided by Plutarch, who in his *Life of Agis* reported that among the 700 citizens which Sparta still had in 243 BC, ‘there were about 100 who owned land and an allotment [*kleros*]’ (5.4). Since one could not be a citizen without owning land, this must mean that 600 citizens owned only an allotment while the richest one hundred owned both an allotment and additional land.¹⁸ Evidently, the concentration of privately owned land had continued to progress as it had done before Leuktra, so that the number of regular landowners had fallen from 700 (or 900) to one hundred, but the decline of citizen manpower had been halted by the introduction of fixed, indivisible ‘allotments’ for 700 citizens. The implied rate of decline in the number of regular landowners is 1.5 per cent (or 1.7 per cent) p.a., amounting to a decline of 60 per cent (or 63 per cent) over a span of thirty years, which perhaps not coincidentally matches the 59–63 per cent of landowners who end up with 0.8 or less of their parents’ property according to Hodkinson’s model of the consequences of partible inheritance.¹⁹

The institution of indivisible allotments in order to halt this decline is alluded to in two other texts.²⁰ One is Plutarch’s *Instituta Laconica*, a collection of notes on Sparta, which differed from his *Life of Lykourgos* and his *Sayings of Spartans* in making no reference to any equal division of land.²¹ In the context of granting citizen rights, this mentions ‘the share [*moira*] allocated

from the beginning; to sell it is not allowed' (*Mor.* 238e). The other text is the *Constitution of the Lakedaimonians* attributed to Aristotle, probably written in the 330s. The treatise itself does not survive, but we have excerpts from an epitome made by Herakleides Lembos in the second century BC, which includes the information that: 'to sell land is among the Lakedaimonians deemed shameful. Of the ancient share [*archaia moira*] it was not allowed' (Ar. fr. 611.12 Rose). As the translation shows, the text is disjointed, and the information it conveys is not repeated in Aristotle's *Politics*, which says only that the lawgiver 'made it dishonourable to buy or sell landed property' (1270a20–3). Some scholars therefore argue that the reference to 'the ancient share' was not part of Aristotle's text but a later insertion by Herakleides or his excerptor.²² The lack of syntactical coherence proves nothing, however, in what is after all a mere medieval excerpt from an epitome, written in staccato style throughout and strewn with grammatical infelicities and outright errors. The theoretical possibility that something was added to the text is not supported by the excerpts from the *Constitution of the Athenians*, which compress, omit and garble a great deal, but contain no substantive material that does not also appear in the Aristotelian original.²³

We thus have no good reason to deny that Aristotle or his student in the *Constitution of the Lakedaimonians* made a distinction between an 'ancient share' which one was forbidden by law to sell, and other land which one was under merely moral pressure not to sell.²⁴ Since some such scheme is also implied in Plutarch's *Life of Agis* and offers a plausible explanation for why citizen numbers stopped falling, it is reasonable to conclude that the Spartan government solved the post-Leuktra crisis by creating for each of the remaining 700 or so citizens an indivisible allotment large enough to ensure that the holder would never be in danger of losing his citizenship. These allotments probably covered about a quarter of Sparta's agricultural territory in Lakonia (see later) and could not be established without a partial redistribution of land, but they left the bulk of the land in purely private ownership.

If Aristotle's *Politics* did not mention Sparta when discussing 'old allotments' in Greek cities (1266b15–24; 1319a10–11), any more than it mentioned 'allotments' when analysing the Spartan constitution, this was probably a deliberate omission. Aristotle was aware that Sparta's 'ancient allotments' were in fact recent innovations, and his purpose in *Politics* was to criticize the flaws of the traditional 'Lykourgan' system, not to assess recent modifications.²⁵ In Plato's work, by contrast, the introduction of indivisible 'ancient shares' after Leuktra is clearly reflected. In his *Republic*, written in the 380s or 370s, Plato depicted Sparta as the archetypal oligarchy, driven by greed and competition for wealth (544c, 545a), a system inimical to equality of property. Yet in his *Laws*, written in the 350s, he said that those who led the earliest Dorian settlement in the Peloponnese were 'lucky' to start with a

clean slate, so that they could easily ‘arrange for a degree of equality of property’ without having to resort to such much-resented measures as redistribution of land or cancellation of debt (684de, 736cd). He proceeded to propose a property regime for his ideal city which was essentially the same as what we have inferred for post-Leuktra Sparta: a basic inalienable and irreducible ‘allotment’ (*klēros*) for every citizen, plus privately owned and transmitted property (*ousia*) up to three times the value of the allotment (744e–745be; cf. 856d, 857a, 923c–4a).

If Plato’s changing attitude towards Sparta reflected an awareness of a new, post-Leuktra, property regime in Sparta, we may surmise that the new inalienable allotments were called ‘ancient shares’ because it was claimed, by way of justification, that their introduction represented a return, not to Lykourgos, but to the very first settlement in Sparta, as Plato hinted and as was later suggested also by Isokrates.²⁶ This would have sounded all the more plausible if the allotments were concentrated around Sparta itself, in the territory supposedly occupied by the first settlers, rather than in the richer plains of southern Lakonia, which according to one version of the tradition had been conquered much later.²⁷

We may even be able to estimate the size of these newly invented ‘ancient shares’. Plutarch says that a Spartan citizen household received from its helot labour force a fixed ‘tribute’ (*apophora*) of eighty-two *medimnoi* of barley – seventy for a man, twelve for his wife – and other kinds of produce ‘in proportion’ (*Lyk.* 8.4; cf. 24.3). Such a fixed payment implies an allotment of a fixed size and is of course incompatible with the highly unequal distribution of land of the archaic and classical age. It has been suggested that this ‘tribute’ was a creation of the propaganda of Agis IV or an element of the actual land reform of Kleomenes III.²⁸ However, the only other text to mention a fixed payment is *Instituta Laconica* (Plut. *Mor.* 239e), which shows no sign of any belief in a Lykourgan redistribution of land but does mention the ‘ancient shares’. What is more, this level of ‘tribute’ implied an estate of at least 15 ha (37 acres), which was perfectly viable for a mere 700 allotments, but not for the 4,500 or 6,000 allotments which featured in the reforms of Agis and Kleomenes. Lakonia, with 45,000 ha of agricultural land, had room for only 3,000 such plots; if Agis or Kleomenes had set this level of tribute, their reforms would not have been viable even in theory. By contrast, 700 ‘ancient shares’ of about 15 ha each would occupy in total less than a quarter of Lakonia.²⁹

In sum, apart from five revolutionary years during the reign of Kleomenes III, Sparta had no equality of landownership at any time. Inequality increased throughout its history down to 370/69 BC, but was for a long time offset by the conquest of new land, probably cultivated on a share-cropping basis, with the subjected population handing over 50 per cent of their crops.³⁰ This meant that even the poorest citizens were relatively well off, and that the richest

Spartans were exceptionally wealthy. When conquests stopped after 550 BC, continuing concentration of property caused sharper economic inequalities. After the loss of two-thirds of the land in the liberation of Messenia, further decline was halted by the creation of indivisible ‘ancient shares’ in 370/69. These allotments produced a fixed tribute rather than a share of the crops, and it is likely that this tribute amounted to less than half of the average annual yield, thus reducing the burden on the helot cultivators – many of whom were deserting at the time.³¹ Nevertheless, the revenue which citizens derived from these lots enabled them to live in leisure,³² and those who owned land in addition to their allotment were very wealthy indeed. By the time of Agis IV, a mere one hundred households shared all the non-reserved land, an average of perhaps 300 ha (750 acres) each. His reforms envisaged redistributing these vast estates in lots of about 10 ha, while Kleomenes allocated lots of about 7.5 ha. Given that these needed to feed not only the citizens but also the cultivators, landownership at this level would have entailed genuine ‘austerity’ all round. But inequality was quickly restored.

8.1.2 The restriction of coinage

After his supposed redistribution of land, according to Plutarch, Lykourgos also wanted to ‘divide equally all the contents of the houses, so as to remove every form of inequality and dissimilarity’, but he was unable to do this and instead achieved the same result by banning gold and silver coinage, and replacing it with an iron currency.³³ Xenophon had argued that Sparta’s low-value local currency was designed to make it impossible to acquire money ‘by unjust means’ because it was too bulky to hide (*Lak. Pol.* 7.3–6), but Plutarch credited the lawgiver also with a second, even more ambitious motive: by banning valuable currency, Lykourgos made it impossible for Spartans to engage in trade and thus to buy any ‘luxuries’. Those who owned much movable wealth thus had no means of displaying it, and local craftsmen produced only simple, inexpensive essential furniture and tableware.³⁴ It is important to distinguish and disentangle the elements of this tradition: the Spartans’ use of an iron currency did not necessarily go hand-in-hand with a ban on foreign gold or silver currency, since many cities without their own precious metal currency did freely use silver coins minted by Aigina or Athens, for example. Nor would a ban on gold and silver currency necessarily have had the consequences which Plutarch attributes to it.³⁵

First, the ban on foreign coinage. No such measure can have been enacted in the eighth century or earlier, since the first (silver) coinages were not minted in mainland Greece much before 550 BC. A ban might have been imposed in the late sixth century, the date at which anecdotal evidence suggests Spartans started to fear that the temptation of foreign gold and silver laid open their

kings and leading men to bribery and other forms of corruption. Yet Herodotos, our earliest source for such anecdotes, does not even hint that it was illegal to own precious metal: his stories concern only the immoral means by which it was acquired.³⁶ Moreover, twice in the fifth century we hear of a Spartan king condemned to pay a fine expressed in terms of drachmas or talents, which is hardly conceivable if ownership of silver coinage was banned at the time. During the Peloponnesian War the Spartan government is known to have offered 'much silver' as a reward for volunteers who managed to smuggle supplies to the troops caught on Sphakteria in 425 BC, and it was structurally dependent on donations of Greek silver and Persian gold to pay for its fleet and mercenaries. Sparta also acquired much precious metal by way of booty.³⁷ Plato was thus surely right to picture a Sparta flooded with foreign coins during the Peloponnesian War and to conclude that 'these people are the richest of Greeks in gold and silver', without any suggestion that they broke some Lykourgan law in becoming so rich (*Alkib.* I.123a; see above).

The first reference to a ban occurs in the context of a huge influx of booty in 404/3 BC, when Lysandros sent 1,000 or 1,500 talents home to Sparta and his envoy Gylippos was found to have stolen some of the money in his charge. One of the ephors proposed that 'they should not welcome gold and silver coinage into the city, but use the ancestral one', i.e. the iron currency, but opposition by supporters of Lysandros led to a compromise solution: 'they decided to import such coinage for public use, but if anyone was caught having it in private ownership, the penalty was death'.³⁸ Plutarch regarded this compromise as a relaxation of Lykourgos' ban (cf. *Lyk.* 30.1; *Agis* 5.1), but the story itself shows that this cannot be true. If there had been a ban on foreign coinage, Lysandros would not have openly sent home a vast amount of it. If for whatever reason he had so outrageously flouted a ban, it ought to have been the arrival of the money, rather than its embezzlement, which prompted the ephor to take action. Notably, the proposal and the decree, as cited by Plutarch, contained no reference to an existing prohibition, and did not ban all precious metal, only *coined* gold and silver.³⁹ Clearly, there was in fact no ban before 404/3. Its introduction in that year was an attempt to deprive Lysandros of the influence he would have derived from vastly enriching Sparta: Gylippos' alleged theft of money gave Lysandros' enemies an excuse to present foreign coinage as a corrupting force which had to be contained by an unprecedented ban. Tellingly, the only person known to have been executed under the ban was Lysandros' close supporter Thorax.⁴⁰

Xenophon's account of currency reflects this episode, for not only did he attribute to Lykourgos the aim of preventing illegal gain, rather than the acquisition of money as such, but when he turned from the iron currency to the ban on precious metal, he switched to the present tense: 'they search for gold and silver and if they find it anywhere the owner is punished' (7.6). No

doubt he wanted the reader to infer that this custom was also due to Lykourgos, but strictly speaking he said only that it happened in his own day. The first author to claim that the Spartans never used gold or silver coinage before the decree of 404/3 was apparently Ephoros in the late fourth century, but even he did not yet attribute the ban to Lykourgos: instead, he seems to have thought that it was instituted after the First Messenian War.⁴¹ Other late-fourth-century authors may have made the link with Lykourgos, but surviving accounts which certainly attributed a ban to Lykourgos all date from after the late-third-century revolution.⁴² We can see the myth in the making, and it did not stop here: some added imaginatively that Lykourgos dedicated to Apollo at Delphi all the silver and gold taken out of circulation, and that it was this ancient sacred treasure, not the spoils of the Peloponnesian War, which Lysandros brought to Sparta. One fantastic tale even imagined that the Spartans circumvented the ban by depositing their gold and silver with friends in Arkadia, then waging endless wars against Arkadian cities to disguise their deception.⁴³

Not only did a ban on private ownership of foreign currency not exist before 404/3 BC, but it remained in force for only a short time. In 382 BC, the imposition of a fine of 100,000 drachmas implies that ownership of silver currency was evidently once again legitimate.⁴⁴ Xenophon, probably writing at about the same time, declared that the Spartans ‘used to be afraid of being shown to own gold, but now there are some who are openly proud of owning it’ (*Lak. Pol.* 14.3). It is not difficult to see why the ban was no longer enforced. As an *ad hominem* move against Lysandros it lost its main purpose after his death in 395. Secondly, it was very difficult to implement insofar as it involved not only preventing the acquisition of foreign coins but also confiscating the currency already owned by many Spartans, or else exchanging it for countless tonnes of iron. Finally, it was easy for individuals to circumvent the ban by melting down their gold and silver coins to bullion. The ban is thus unlikely to have lasted even a decade, and it is only because it fed so perfectly into an ideal image of Sparta that this doomed temporary measure permanently entered the legend of Lykourgos.

The development of this legend was much helped by the fact that the Spartans did not strike their own silver coinage but did have an unusual iron currency. The latter must in practice have functioned alongside foreign currency, but could easily be imagined as intended to be a substitute for gold and silver coins. Classical authors commented on the iron currency’s weight and its brittleness – deliberately achieved by quenching in vinegar rather than water – but not on its shape, which rules out the possibility that the Spartans continued to use the iron roasting spits which had been used in the Peloponnese before the invention of coinage as a measure of value and occasional means of exchange.⁴⁵ Classical Spartan currency was evidently shaped much like other Greek coinages; the coin may have been called *pelanor*, and struck with the

design of a horse.⁴⁶ It is said to have had a value of ‘four bronzes’, i.e. one-third of an Aeginetan silver obol (0.3 gr.). Xenophon’s claim that it would take a cartload (up to 1,000 kg) of iron coinage to match the value of 10 minae of silver (4.3 kg), indicates a value-ratio between silver and iron coinage of about 1:200, which fits the range of attested normal silver:iron value-ratios: by implication, one iron coin weighed up to 60 grammes and was simply worth its weight in iron.⁴⁷ One source claimed that it weighed more than 600 gr., but that must be wild exaggeration, another example of myth-making after the ‘radicalization’ of Lykourgos in the late third century.⁴⁸ Unfortunately, no specimens have been found, but that is not surprising because iron is more perishable than gold or silver, and the brittleness of Spartans coins will have aggravated this problem.

Coins worth their weight in iron will have been first struck before token coinages for low denominations were invented in the late fifth century, as their label ‘ancestral’ (*patrios*) in the decree banning foreign coinage confirms. It is entirely likely, therefore, that Sparta began to coin at about the same time as most other cities, in the decades around 500 BC, but chose a unique form of currency. The use of iron was no doubt dictated by the availability of iron mines, but not silver or gold mines, in Lakonia. The practice of making coins brittle presumably served to ensure that they continued to circulate and were not forged into tools or weapons.⁴⁹ Their low value and awkwardness meant that they could only be used in local, small-scale transactions, but since the same function could have been fulfilled by low-denomination foreign silver coins of the same or smaller value, which were widely minted by 525 BC,⁵⁰ what is remarkable is not so much that Sparta minted ‘only’ iron coins, but that it minted any coins at all, rather than rely wholly on foreign currency, as others did.

So far as monetary wealth was concerned, then, Sparta was not very different from other Greek states: it was one of many cities which did not go so far as to import silver in order to strike its own coinage,⁵¹ and it went further than most who chose not to coin in silver or gold by creating its own low-value coinage to facilitate small-scale local exchange. Spartans used foreign coinage without restriction, except during a brief political crisis. Nothing in this hampered the acquisition of wealth or engagement in local and foreign trade, and nothing in this contributed to the creation of greater equality or austerity.

8.1.3 The ban on ‘making money’ (*chrēmatismos*)

Plutarch complemented his portrayal of economic equality in Sparta with an idyllic image of a city where no one worked for a living, where commercial transactions were kept to a minimum, no disputes over money occurred, and no one even *talked* about money or profit (*Lyk.* 24.3–25.1; *Mor.* 239de). Part

of this picture was foreshadowed by Xenophon, who said that Lykourgos ‘forbade free men to touch anything to do with making money’ (*Lak. Pol.* 7.2), but again Plutarch’s expansion of it was no more than idealizing myth-making and even Xenophon demonstrably overstated his case. Classical Spartans certainly lived lives of leisure, but at least some of their wealth must have come from commercial activity.

The context in which Xenophon makes his remark shows that the ban on making money in fact extended only to making a living from one’s own labour as a farmer, trader or craftsman (*Lak. Pol.* 7.1) – a point also made by other sources, starting with Herodotos’ observation that the Spartans most of all Greeks had a low regard for craftsmen but highly esteemed ‘those who abstain from manual labour and above all those who are devoted to war’.⁵² A ban on working as a trader or craftsman was simply a way of imposing the requirement, not uncommon in Greek city-states, that only owners of substantial landed estates were eligible for citizen status. Elsewhere, this might be achieved by explicitly defining the minimum size of a citizen’s landed property, but since in Sparta the property threshold was defined only indirectly, through the level of contributions in kind to the public messes, it was necessary to spell out that these contributions had to come from one’s own estates, not bought with money earned in trade or crafts. Citizens may still have been indirectly involved in trade and crafts, for instance through ownership of workshops operated by non-Spartiates.

Spartans were certainly not prevented from ‘making money’ from their landed estates. Plutarch explicitly assumed that all citizens received from the helots only a fixed ‘rent’ which was enough for all their needs but left no surplus. As we have seen, such a situation never existed, and inequality of landownership meant that in reality some citizens had huge agricultural surpluses while others could barely scrape together their mess contributions, and many fell below the citizenship – or indeed the subsistence-threshold. Moreover, wealthy Spartans owned much livestock (mainly in Messenia: Plato, *Alkib.* I.122d), which produced additional surpluses of meat, cheese and wool. Some form of exchange for all these products was clearly required. Gift-giving in kind did occur but market exchange played a structural role as well: both the meat and the infamous black broth eaten in the public messes came from pigs that were bought in the market with money collected from each mess-member.⁵³ Every Spartan citizen did evidently make at least some money, and the sale of livestock was one source of income, surely alongside the sale of produce.

The integral role of market exchange in Spartan life is indicated by a rule which Plutarch, ironically, cites as evidence for aloofness from money-making: only men over the age of thirty were allowed to buy ‘household necessities’ in the *agora* (*Lyk.* 25.1). That this was genuine classical practice but not a sign of disdain for commerce emerges from Thucydides’ report on

the fate of the Spartan soldiers who surrendered to the Athenians on Sphakteria in 425 BC: on their release four years later, they were deprived of the rights 'to hold office and to make legally valid purchases or sales' (5.34.2). The right to hold office, too, was reserved for men over 30 (Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 4.7), so the disgraced soldiers' punishment was a reduction to the status of permanent 'minors'. By implication, the legal capacity to buy and sell was deemed as great a privilege as having full political rights, and commercial exchange must have been common and valuable enough to make control over such transactions a major asset.⁵⁴

Confirmation comes from Xenophon's description of the *agora* in Sparta in the early fourth century (*Hell.* 3.3.5, 7): he imagined that at any given moment only some forty citizens might be present here on private business, but as many as 4,000 non-citizens. We may deduce that there were hundreds of vendors and thousands of customers. The complexity of this market is illustrated by the existence of a distinct 'ironware' section where weapons and tools were sold: as one would imagine in a market on this scale, there was sufficient demand to allow differentiation between clusters of traders and craftsmen with different specializations, just as in the *agora* at Athens. And just as in Athens, public officials exercised their duties alongside the traders; political meeting-place and market place were not separated, unlike in Thessaly where citizens also lived in leisure off the labour of agricultural serfs.⁵⁵

In short, wealthy Spartan citizens disposed of large surpluses of grain, wine and other produce as well as herds of livestock; they had a convenient outlet in the large commercial centre in the middle of the city; and they regarded the right to buy and sell in this market as a high privilege. It is therefore almost inconceivable that they did not sell their surpluses for profit, by means of wholesale transactions with the retailers who sold the goods in the market to customers from across the region. Iron coinage was surely introduced precisely to facilitate such trade, wholesale and retail, which was essential to Spartan landowners.

Plutarch's notion that there were no financial disputes because there was no money-making in Sparta is contradicted by the author himself elsewhere in *Lykourgos* when he says that 'contracts about money' were not subject to detailed written law but left to expert judgement (13.2), implying that such contracts were regularly made, and again in *Sayings of Spartans*, where he reports that the ephors tried cases 'involving contracts' among citizens every single day (*Mor.* 221b). Each ephor specialized in dealing with a different type of disputed contract (*Ar. Pol.* 1275b9–10).⁵⁶ Commercial transactions were surely a major subject of contractual agreements, so the frequency and specialization of dispute settlement is yet more evidence for the extent of money-making by Spartan citizens. One other major type of contract must have concerned loans. From Herodotos onwards, we have allusions to

Spartans, including the kings, lending and borrowing, and there was apparently a distinctive Spartan way of recording such transactions. Given the rate at which inequality of property developed, many poorer Spartans will have borrowed from the rich in an effort to hang on to their citizenship, and among non-citizens even more families will have been in need of extra money. It is no surprise that by 243 BC indebtedness was so widespread and severe that cancellation of debt was a prominent part of the revolutionary agenda of Agis IV and Kleomenes III,⁵⁷ and we must infer that the making of loans, in money or in kind, was another source of profit in Sparta, as it was for the rich everywhere in Greece.

Spartiates were thus not banned from ‘making money’ in a variety of ways, and what lies behind this myth is merely the exclusion from citizenship of those who made a living from manual labour and professional commerce. This exclusion may not have come into force until the late sixth century: Pausanias mentioned six archaic ‘Lakonian’ or ‘Lakedaimonian’ sculptors and another three who were explicitly ‘Spartiates’, including Syadras and Khartas, dated to c.550 BC and important enough to be credited with tutoring an apprentice from Corinth.⁵⁸ As noted, the exclusion of craftsmen and traders served to ensure that only owners of sizeable landed properties were eligible for citizenship, and the most fundamental form of equality among Spartan citizens, namely that they were all leisured landowners, thus appears to have been created only after the middle of the sixth century, at the end of the archaic age.⁵⁹

8.2 ‘Modern Simplicity’: Restriction of Display

Ultimately, even Plutarch was unable to sustain the fiction that all Spartans owned modest and equal amounts of property. He let slip that there were after all rich men, but that ‘they had no way to bring their wealth into the public eye: it remained stored indoors and idle’ (*Lyk.* 9.4; cf. 10.3; *Mor.* 226ef). Xenophon took the same line: Lykourgos discouraged ‘making money’ by removing opportunities to spend on ‘pampering’ (*Lak. Pol.* 7.3). The only restrictions specified by Xenophon were a certain austerity in dress and diet for men and boys (2.3–5, 7.3–4), which we shall consider in detail later, but once again Plutarch and others also listed numerous other restrictions which require investigation.

8.2.1 The decline of imported ‘luxuries’

The first sumptuary regulation mentioned in both the *Life of Lykourgos* and the *Sayings of Lykourgos* is an ‘expulsion of everything superfluous’. In the

former, longer version this is presented as a law which forbade foreign craftsmen and specialists from entering Sparta, but it is added that even without a formal ban such persons would have stopped coming to Sparta because they would not have had any use for iron coins (*Lyk.* 9.3–5). The latter version, by contrast, says that Lykourgos' banning of gold and silver coinage put an end to theft, bribery, fraud and robbery, and 'in addition he brought about the expulsion of everything superfluous ... for he did not allow them to have a convenient currency' (*Mor.* 226d). In other words, the disappearance of traders and foreign specialists is here presented as an intended side-effect of monetary reform, not as a formal ban at all. It seems, therefore, that Plutarch in the *Life of Lykourgos* invented a non-existent ban out of the idea that traders and craftsmen spontaneously stopped coming to Sparta because the rewards were too small.⁶⁰

Archaeological evidence shows that Sparta did indeed begin to import less in the course of the archaic period. The evidence is in effect limited to dedications found at four sanctuaries and pottery found by survey of a stretch of Spartan countryside, and cannot give a full picture of Spartan material culture, but it does offer an indication of trends. In the seventh century, the dedications included imported goods, and towards the end of this century the poet Alkman referred to Spartan girls wearing 'Lydian' headdresses, so that cloth and perhaps other perishable items were imported as well.⁶¹ From the early sixth century onwards, the number of imports declines, and instead we find an increasing number of high-quality goods produced in Lakonia itself, notably ornate bronze vessels and figurative ceramic tableware, both of which were exported to other parts of the Greek world and beyond.⁶² This initial decline of imports is thus no evidence for a culture of austerity, but suggests that demand in Sparta for 'luxury' goods was high enough to stimulate local production of high-value commodities. Generally, the material record does not suggest that Sparta was unusual: dedications change in nature and their numbers fall, especially after 500 BC, but the same is true elsewhere in Greece and Sparta merely reflects a general change in attitude towards making offerings at sanctuaries.⁶³ However, after c.525 BC Lakonian figurative pottery was no longer produced, yet no Attic or other foreign pottery was imported to take its place; only locally-made black-glaze or plain pottery was used.⁶⁴ This is the first and only clear sign in the archaeological record, as opposed to literary evidence, of a distinctively Spartan austerity.

8.2.2 Public restraint and private luxury in domestic display

Plutarch repeatedly mentioned a Lykourgan law which dictated that only two tools could be used on the woodwork of houses: an axe for the roof and a saw

for the door. Roof-beams would thus be little more than roughly cut tree trunks and doors would be made of simple unplanned planks. Accordingly, Xenophon cited the doors of the ancestral royal residence as evidence for the simplicity of king Agesilaos' lifestyle: 'see what kind of house was enough for him, marvel at his doors – anyone might think that they were still the same ones that Aristodemos the Heraklid picked up and installed when he arrived in Sparta – and try to imagine the furnishings inside' (*Ages.* 8.7). It is credible that sumptuary legislation would focus on the woodwork of houses, which was highly valued (esp. *Thuc.* 2.14.1). What is more, this form of austerity was said to be prescribed by one of only three '*rhētrai*', i.e. formal laws, attributed to Lykourgos, which suggests that it was not just a retrojection of classical ideals, but recorded in an archaic law, like the Great Rhetra. Restriction of the use of tools, rather than of maximum expenditure in monetary terms, does sound as if it pre-dated the introduction of coinage.⁶⁵ A date around 600 BC is suggested by Leotykhidas I's mocking comment about elaborately crafted ceilings at Corinth,⁶⁶ if that was not randomly attributed.

Xenophon hinted that behind a plain door one would expect to find simple furniture, furnishings and tableware; Plutarch believed that simplicity in domestic architecture deterred Spartans from filling their houses with valuables (*Mor.* 189e, 227c; *Lyk.* 13.3–4). But significantly neither author actually claimed that the contents of a house – potentially of greater cumulative value than the building itself – were subject to sumptuary legislation,⁶⁷ and critics of Sparta explicitly said that there were in fact no limits on interior decoration or movable valuables. Plato pictured Sparta and Crete as 'timocracies' where citizens

wildly worship gold and silver, [but hide it] in storerooms and domestic treasuries ... and behind the courtyard walls of their dwellings – in a word, in private nests within which they may squander a fortune in spending on their wives and the rest. (*Rep.* 548ab)

Aristotle complained that women in Sparta:

live in luxury (*trupherōs*) and without restraint in any form of indulgence, so that of necessity in a political system of this kind people will honour wealth. (*Pol.* 1269b22–5)

Lykourgos tried to bring the women under control of the laws, but since they resisted he gave up, [and this lack of control is] conducive to a love of wealth. (1270a7–8, 12–15)

The emphasis on luxury and wealth shows that Aristotle is not criticizing here the relative freedom and influence of Spartan women. This would have had little bearing on competition for wealth, and was not normally regarded as the result of a failure by Lykourgos to legislate for women but as the result of measures deliberately imposed by the lawgiver.⁶⁸ Aristotle's remarks only

make sense if, like Plato, he referred to a lack of regulation of private indoor display of wealth. For him, a failure to extend sumptuary legislation to the furniture, bedding, tapestries and tableware in private houses meant that display of wealth continued to play a major part in the lives of women, so that competition for wealth inevitably remained part of Spartan culture, despite the lawgiver's best efforts to eliminate it from the lives of men.

The ownership of other household assets, domestic servants and animals, was only marginally regulated. Rich Spartiates owned great numbers of slaves, horses and hounds.⁶⁹ Many spent heavily on teams of four horses for racing chariots, the ultimate symbol of wealth in the Greek world. A keen interest is already evident in the late seventh century, when Alkman ranked the beauty of Spartan girls by comparing them with foreign breeds of racehorses (fr. 1.50–9; this Volume pp.187f) but becomes most obvious in the fifth century when Spartans dominated chariot-racing at the Olympic Games. This dominance may reflect not only the great wealth of many Spartans, but also restrictions on other kinds of display, which left chariot-racing and the associated construction of victory monuments as the major outlets for conspicuous spending.⁷⁰ The sole restriction imposed on ownership of servants and horses was that one was obliged to let other citizens borrow them, even without permission if needed urgently (Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 6.3), which suggests that their ownership was justified by a notion that they were an asset to the community and should be made available to all. By contrast, one could borrow hounds only by inviting their owner to join the hunting party – though he was morally obliged to send his dogs if he himself could not make it.⁷¹

Houses at Sparta may thus have been subject to sumptuary legislation from an early date, but otherwise there were virtually no restrictions on domestic display. Even 'totalitarian' Sparta thus respected a private sphere: 'what happened at home was not treated as a matter for concern or surveillance, since they regarded a man's front door as the boundary of freedom in his life'.⁷² Sumptuary regulation literally went as far as the door but not beyond.

8.2.3 Wealth, leisure and austerity in personal appearance

Just as Aristophanes ridiculed 'Lakonomaniacs' who wore long hair, carried 'little sticks' and were 'dirty' (*Birds* 1281–3), his contemporary, the comedy writer Plato, mocked a Sparta-imitator as a 'beardy, rope-haired, dirty-knuckled *tribōn*-trailer' (fr. 132 K-A). Later, Demosthenes sneered at 'Lakonisers' who wore '*tribōn*-cloaks and single-soled shoes' (54.34). Between these hostile stereotypes of would-be Spartans and the idealizing

pictures of Spartan dress offered by other sources, it is hard to tell what classical Spartans really wore. But the outlines of a dress code can be discerned: a curious mixture of simplicity and show, contrasted with strict austerity for boys and near-absence of regulation for women and girls.

Xenophon said that Lykourgos ‘allowed’ adult men to wear long hair with the intention of making them look ‘taller, more free and more terrifying’.⁷³ What he meant by ‘more free’ was explained by Aristotle: ‘in Lakedaimon, growing one’s hair long is a noble thing [*kalon*]; for it is the sign of a free man, since one who has long hair cannot easily perform any hired labour’ (*Rhet.* 1367a29–31). Long hair and a long beard required laborious maintenance and therefore some leisure or even the help of a servant, especially in Sparta, where hair was elaborately groomed and to be unkempt was such a disgrace that Klearchos, in captivity in Persia, is said to have given his personal signet ring in exchange for the use of a comb.⁷⁴ Indeed, in wearing long hair and beard but no moustache,⁷⁵ the Spartans adopted the most laborious style of all, requiring both daily shaving and grooming of hair and beard. A different explanation of this custom argued that long hair was the ‘most inexpensive kind of ornament’.⁷⁶ These ideas are perfectly compatible and in line with Spartan ideals: the hairstyle was a sign of the leisure-class status shared by all Spartan citizens, but it was a status symbol which cost time rather than money.

Some sources date the introduction of the Spartan hairstyle long after Lykourgos,⁷⁷ but in fact long hair, beards and shaven upper lips were common among the Greek upper classes in the archaic period, so that it was not so much a matter of the Spartans adopting the style as of not abandoning it when short hair and beards with moustaches became the norm elsewhere in the late sixth century.⁷⁸ What appears to have happened is that greater equality in personal appearance was achieved in most of the Greek world by the elite adopting ‘lower-class’ short haircuts, whereas in Sparta all citizens were required to adopt an upper-class hairstyle.

Adult men everywhere in Greece carried staffs, but Aristophanes’ sarcastic reference to the ‘little sticks’ of the Sparta-imitators may refer to a distinctive ‘staff of the crooked type from Lakedaimon’. A series of incidents in which Spartan officers hit subordinates with their staffs shows that Spartans were particularly inseparable from their ‘sticks’ and exceptionally ready to use them as a means of asserting their masculinity and superiority. Such staffs were apparently exported to Athens where they were regarded as a minor luxury.⁷⁹

The ‘single-soled’ shoes of Lakonizers were probably not actual Spartan footwear, but an Athenian form of austerity of the same kind as the habit of going barefoot adopted by Sokrates and other philosophers. Spartan shoes, like staffs, were regarded as rather luxurious: Kritias went so far as to declare that ‘Lakonian footwear is the best’ (F 34 DK; Ath. 483b). A comfortable

type of shoe known as ‘Lakonian’ was exported to, or imitated at, Athens and commonly worn there; they were shoes for men only, and typically dyed red, a colour associated with manliness and superiority.⁸⁰ Another Spartan type of shoe, the ‘Amyklaian’, is said to have been ‘expensive’ and designed for ‘free men’, i.e. leisured gentlemen.⁸¹

In sharp contrast to the rest of the fine ensemble of long hair and beard, curved staff and red shoes stood Spartan clothes. Thucydides and Aristotle agreed that in Sparta ‘the rich wear the sort of clothes which even any given poor man would be able to get for himself’, which for Thucydides was characteristic of ‘modern simplicity’ in dress, whereas for Aristotle it was excessively austere, an inverted form of ‘pretentious display’.⁸² At Athens, the poor, as well as misers and Lakonizers, wore a type of cloak known as *tribōn*, and although no classical source says explicitly that Spartans also wore this, we may infer from Thucydides and Aristotle that they did, as indeed later sources frequently claimed.⁸³ The *tribōn* was a rectangular piece of cloth draped around the body as a cloak, apparently smaller, thinner and coarser than the otherwise similar draped cloaks of the wealthy.⁸⁴ The Spartan version may have had a distinctive ‘fringe of ribbons’, probably woollen tassels, but otherwise it was no different from its counterparts elsewhere in Greece, so far as we can tell.⁸⁵ A late source tells us that a Spartan word for cloak was *damophanēs*, i.e. a garment ‘in which the people make their appearance’. This suggests not only uniformity of dress among citizens but also a uniformity confined to public appearance, as opposed to clothes worn at home.⁸⁶

The very poor, mean or ascetic in Athens would wear only a *tribōn*, without the normal tunic (*chitōn*) underneath, and later sources claim that Agesilaos, too, dressed like this even in his old age and in cold weather to set an example to younger men (Plut. *Mor.* 210b; Ael. *VH* 7.13). But this is myth-making, since there is no reference to it in the contemporary eulogy of Agesilaos by Xenophon, who did elsewhere comment on the king’s austere lifestyle and expressed admiration for Sokrates’ austerity in not wearing a tunic.⁸⁷ It seems likely that Spartan men normally did wear tunics, which were probably of the type known as *exōmis*, an ‘off-the-shoulder’ garment leaving the right arm completely free, which is often represented in art as worn by soldiers and working men.⁸⁸

Classical Spartans thus adopted the cheapest style of clothing current in the Greek world, which is surprising given that even the least well-off citizens were wealthy enough to afford something more luxurious, as displayed in their hairstyle, footwear and staffs. An explanation may lie in Kritias’ enthusiasm for Spartan clothes as ‘the most pleasant and convenient to wear’ (fr. 34 D-K). The clothes of the rich elsewhere in Greece displayed wealth at the expense of comfort: their long tunics and especially the large cloaks wrapped around their bodies severely impeded freedom of movement, and

must often have been very hot, so the *tribōn* and *exōmis* were indeed not only cheaper but also more comfortable.⁸⁹ These garments probably projected an image of the Spartans as dressed pragmatically rather than poorly – dressed to spend their leisure in physical activity, sport and war, not in idleness. The ornamental tassels may have served to distinguish Spartan dress from plain ‘working-class’ outfits, signalling that it was not imposed by poverty but freely chosen by men who could afford something more decorative. If there was anything in the notion that Spartans were ‘dirty’, despite the importance of personal grooming in Sparta, it will have been that they got dusty as a result of their active lifestyle rather than that they rejected laundering and bathing as luxuries.⁹⁰ Beyond hiding economic differences, restricting the display of wealth in dress thus served to encourage and emphasize physical excellence: ‘they adorn themselves with the fitness of their bodies, not the costliness of their clothes’.⁹¹

A degree of uniformity in Spartan military dress is attested by Xenophon: Lykourgos made citizens wear ‘a red outfit’ (*stolē phoinikis*) and carry ‘a bronze shield’ in battle (*Lak. Pol.* 11.3). But neither strict uniformity nor a peculiarly Spartan outfit can be inferred. It is often assumed that the *phoinikis* was a distinctive military cloak. However, despite the occasional appearance in Greek art of a soldier with a short cloak dramatically but unrealistically flying behind him as if in a storm, it would have been suicidal to hamper one’s movements in hand-to-hand combat by donning any sort of cloak. The *phoinikis* must normally have been a tunic.⁹² By Xenophon’s time red tunics were worn by hoplites across Greece,⁹³ and the Spartan outfit was unusual only insofar as the red colour of the tunic and full bronze facing (rather than bronze trimmings) of the shield were not merely common but compulsory.

Nor can we assume that Sparta went beyond this minimal level of standardization, since neither Xenophon nor anyone else mentions any regulation of helmets, body armour or weapons. Indeed, according to Plutarch, Sparta’s regulation of dress was less strict on campaign than in civilian life (*Lyk.* 22.1). At any given time, certain types of equipment were in common use, of course, but within those parameters, it is likely that citizens chose their own arms and armour, as in other Greek armies. The Spartans, who went into battle with elaborately dressed hair and polished arms and armour, may well have availed themselves of the opportunity to display the most glittering armour they could afford – and indeed the most expensive deep crimson tunics: some red dyes were much more costly than others.⁹⁴

The prominence of the red tunic shows that it cannot be true, as the Stoic philosopher Khrysisippos asserted, that Spartans were allowed to wear only clothes which retained the natural colour of the wool. His further claim that Spartans were not allowed to anoint themselves with scented oil, only with pure olive oil, was evidently an analogous invention.⁹⁵ Overall, the personal appearance of adult Spartan men thus advertised a considerable level of

wealth and left scope for individuals to distinguish themselves; the main element of both uniformity and austerity was the relative standardization of civilian cloaks and military tunics.

The dress code for teenage boys, by contrast, was much more austere. Their hair was cut short, they did not wear shoes, and wore the same cloak throughout the year regardless of season.⁹⁶ Plutarch claimed that boys wore no tunics under these cloaks, but that was probably based on a misreading of Xenophon inspired by the usual idealization of Spartan asceticism. He added that the boys bathed and anointed themselves only a few times a year – presumably on the occasion of public festivals.⁹⁷ The same pattern of imposing more austere rules upon boys than upon men recurred in the organization of public messes (see [Chapter 9](#)). Xenophon argued that Lykourgos' goal in imposing this dress code was to improve the boys' ability to run, jump and climb and to endure extremes of heat and cold (*Lak. Pol.* 2.3–4), just as he believed that the arrangements for the boys' messes brought physical and psychological benefits which made them better soldiers (2.5–7). This may indeed have been a factor, but it is remarkable that the adult men who actually fought as soldiers were no longer subject to the same constraints. The reason why boys were singled out in this way may rather lie in the other main goals of Spartan education stressed by Xenophon: respect for authorities, obedience and self-control (2.2, 10–11; 3.1–5). Deprivation may have served to instil discipline.⁹⁸

No restrictions on female dress are suggested by the critical comments of Plato and Aristotle about the 'luxury' enjoyed by Spartan women in the privacy of their homes. Some sources complain that the short tunics sometimes worn by Spartan girls and the robes worn without a tunic underneath by Spartan women revealed too much of their legs, but there is no suggestion that these distinctive styles of dress were seen as in any way austere or luxurious.⁹⁹ Otherwise, the only evidence for regulation of the personal appearance of women comes from the Aristotelian *Constitution*, which according to the excerpted epitome said that Lykourgos 'took away decoration from the women in Lakedaimon. Wearing hair long is not allowed, nor is wearing gold' (fr. 611.13).¹⁰⁰ Xenophon, who was a fierce critic of the 'deceitful' use of cosmetics (*Oikon.* 10.2–9), mentioned no measures against beautification in his discussion of the treatment of women in Sparta (*Lak. Pol.* 1.3–9). We should probably infer that short hair and a ban on wearing gold were the *only* aspects of personal appearance subject to regulation. We may even wonder whether the ban on gold was perhaps more limited than the excerpt seems to suggest, since gold jewellery was a major form of display for Greek women and a complete ban would have been the kind of radical measure that one would have expected to feature quite heavily in the historical record.

When these classical dress codes developed is hard to pin down. Alkman

alluded to richly dressed young girls performing in a chorus (fr. 1.64–70; see below), but we cannot make inferences from this about the daily dress of married women.¹⁰¹ The dress style of men and boys was in most respects not distinctive enough to make it identifiable in art. Archaic Lakonian vase-paintings and statuettes represent men clothed much like figures in Corinthian or Athenian art, and in a way compatible with the classical style. A possible exception are their tunics, which have short sleeves and often elaborately patterned borders:¹⁰² if the classical tunic was an off-the-shoulder *exōmis*, and dyed entirely red, it is not shown in archaic Lakonian art, and may have been introduced after c.500 BC. Such a date fits well with Thucydides' claim that the Spartans were the first to adopt a simple style of dress, in contrast to a luxurious style which continued in use elsewhere until 'not long ago' (1.6.3) and is attested at Athens until c.475 BC. Unless Thucydides imagined that the Spartans were several generations ahead of the others, a change of fashion around 500 BC seems implied.¹⁰³

8.2.4 Austerity and the display of personal merit at weddings

Among social occasions which afforded opportunities for the display of wealth, conspicuous wedding processions and feasts featured prominently in archaic Greek poetry and art. A law of Solon's severely restricted the amount of wealth displayed in the bride's procession at Athens, and classical sources hardly mention such forms of display at all, so there may have been a general toning down of wedding ceremonies.¹⁰⁴ Sparta went a step further by abolishing procession and feast altogether. Instead of being conveyed to her husband's house by a crowd of relatives and friends singing wedding hymns, the bride was seized by her husband in a staged 'capture' and handed over to a female assistant who prepared her for the consummation of the marriage, which took place when the husband returned from his daily dinner in the public mess; there was evidently no wedding feast. Our only source for this is Plutarch (*Lyk.* 15), but the practice of ritual capture is confirmed by Herodotos, who alluded to king Demaratos 'seizing' his wife as if this were a well-known custom.¹⁰⁵

Bride seizure may sound like a primitive custom but celebrations of the normal Greek kind evidently still prevailed in late-seventh-century Sparta, since Alkman is said to have composed wedding hymns.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, capture did not replace the normal process of negotiation between the families of bride and groom concerning marriage and dowry,¹⁰⁷ but was merely a ritual conclusion to that process. The ritual offered a neat symbolic expression of the Spartan ideal that personal merit rather than property should determine a man's status. However great the role of wealth and connections had been in

marriage negotiations, ritual seizure acted out a notion that it was man's personal prowess alone which won him a bride and that she was taken purely for her own sake, not for her dowry or family.¹⁰⁸

An even more extreme version of this ritual was described by the third-century author Hermippos of Smyrna, who claimed that young men and women of marriageable age were locked in a darkened room together, and that the men married 'without a dowry' whichever woman they happened to grab hold of in the dark (fr. 87 = Athen. 555c). At first glance, this looks like a bizarre fantasy,¹⁰⁹ but Hermippos claimed that the ritual was practised in the late fifth century, when Lysandros was fined for trying to swap his original 'catch' for a more attractive bride. In his youth, Lysandros was not a full citizen but a *mothax*, i.e. the son of a Spartan who had lost his citizenship, through poverty or as a result of legal punishment.¹¹⁰ In order to ensure that such *mothakes* were not permanently disfranchised, arrangements were made for them to complete a public education alongside the sons of full citizens (see this work, [Chapter 20](#)), so perhaps special arrangements were also made for them to marry. Random pairing off of women who could provide no dowry with men who had no citizen rights may thus have been a genuine classical institution, an adaptation for 'Inferiors' of the custom of bride capture among 'Equals'. The custom is to be distinguished from the broader claim that the lawgiver banned dowries altogether to ensure that women were chosen purely for their personal virtues (Justin 3.3.8; Plut. *Mor.* 227f), a clearly false notion, perhaps inspired by the reforms of the late third century, which may have prohibited dowries in order to maintain the equality established by a redistribution of land.

Classical Spartan wedding customs must have originated later than Alkman's performance of wedding hymns but before Demaratos' marriage around 500 BC. The wedding feast was surely abolished when the public messes were instituted and most forms of private commensality were heavily restricted; it is likely that the wedding procession was suppressed at the same time as the wedding feast. We shall argue that the public messes were created at the very end of the sixth century ([Chapter 9](#)), and if so, Demaratos will have been among the first generation of Spartans to 'capture' their brides.

8.2.5 Austerity and equality in funerary customs

Funerals and graves provided further great opportunities for the display of wealth, and accordingly they were the subject of sumptuary legislation in many Greek city-states. Plutarch credited Lykourgos with reducing the period of mourning to eleven days, banning lamentation, abolishing the very concept of 'pollution' by contact with death so that burials could take place within cities and near temples, and, most relevantly, imposing restrictions on graves

and grave goods.¹¹¹ Our excerpts from the Aristotelian *Constitution of the Lakedaimonians* say only that ‘graves are cheap and the same for all’ in Sparta (fr. 611.13), but the original no doubt offered more detail and may well have been the source for later accounts. Plutarch’s report that graves had no inscriptions, ‘except for a man who died in war and a woman from among the *hierai* who died’, is confirmed by archaeological evidence.¹¹² Grave goods were completely banned. Plutarch says that, ‘putting the body in a red garment and olive leaves, they were to bury everyone in an equal manner’ (*Mor.* 238d), but Claudius Aelian claimed that those who died in war ‘were bound [*anedounto*] with olive branches and other tree branches’, while only outstanding warriors were buried in a red garment (*VH* 6.6).

Aelian’s information has not been taken seriously, but the accuracy of his source is in fact vindicated by other evidence. A distinction between outstanding warriors and the rest of the war dead was made in both of the two Spartan war graves known in some detail: at Plataia in 479 BC, the Spartans were buried in two collective graves, one for the (*h*)*irees* and one for the others; among the *hirees* were the three men whom the Spartans rated as their best fighters, and a fourth who was hit by an arrow before battle but was ‘the most handsome man in the Greek army’ and uttered noble last words (*Hdt.* 9.71–2, 85). The term *hirees* has sometimes been translated ‘priests’ or emended to (*e*)*irenes*, the name of an age group in hellenistic Sparta, but neither makes much sense in the context, and it is increasingly accepted that *hirees* and the feminine form *hierai*, literally ‘holy ones’, were Spartan terms for men and women of exceptional merit.¹¹³ In a Spartan war grave at Athens, of 404 BC, a similar, but subtler, distinction was made: three of the fourteen bodies originally buried here were placed in a distinct central compartment, somewhat more carefully laid out and given larger headrests than the others. They were almost certainly the two polemarchs and the Olympic victor whose names were inscribed on the face of the tomb.¹¹⁴ Since ‘holy ones’ were thus set apart from the other war dead, it is likely that burial in a red garment – i.e. the *phoinikis* tunic which they had worn on the battlefield – was also their special privilege.

A remarkable feature of this burial at Athens is that the position of the collar- and foot-bones shows that the bodies were tightly wrapped or bound from shoulder to toes. It has been suggested that they were wrapped in the *phoinikis*,¹¹⁵ but this is only conceivable if it was a very long, trailing cloak, rather than any garment that might have been worn in war. More probably, the bodies were ‘bound’ with twigs from olive and other trees, as Aelian said.¹¹⁶ The implication is that the war dead who did not qualify for burial in their red tunics were covered by nothing except branches. Such ‘naked’ burial would be a further example of Spartan emphasis on the excellence of the body rather than the value of clothing.

Aelian’s information about Spartan war burial was thus correct, while

Plutarch evidently oversimplified in claiming that all Spartans were buried in exactly the same way – perhaps a result of his reluctance to elaborate on the incentives for military rather than moral excellence in Spartan culture. It follows that apart from the ‘holy ones’ casualties of war were buried in the same manner as ‘civilians’ so far as dress and grave goods were concerned; they were, however, set apart from the ‘civilian’ dead by the great honour of interment in a public tomb on the battlefield. The burials of men were thus more restrained in classical Sparta than anywhere else in Greece – even in the fifth century when very few goods were placed in graves generally, and the value of cloth to be buried with the dead was often limited by law.¹¹⁷ Even the privilege of burial in a red tunic was primarily of symbolic rather than material value. Whether similar regulations existed for the burials of women is not clear; perhaps in death as in life the display of wealth by women was less constrained.

About private graves, as opposed to their contents, we have no information other than that private tombs were ‘cheap’, uniform and normally without inscription. No graves from the classical period have been found, which confirms that they were indeed simple. By contrast, the collective tombs of fallen soldiers were conspicuous monuments, erected at public expense on or near the battlefield. That burial abroad, on the battlefield, was the norm in classical Sparta is clear from attested graves, and also from one of the opening clauses of the so-called Oath of Plataia, which may derive from the oath sworn by Sparta’s smallest military units, the *enōmotiai*: ‘And the dead among my fellow-fighters I shall bury on the spot, and unburied I shall leave no-one.’ Burial ‘on the spot’ was certainly not normal practice everywhere or for everyone. Homer made a distinction between the greatest heroes, who are buried on the battlefield, and the rest, whose ashes are taken home for burial. Classical Athens repatriated all its war dead and thus buried everyone in the manner of common soldiers. Classical Sparta, by contrast, gave all its casualties ‘elite’ treatment in this respect – but at public expense, so as to exclude any display of private wealth.¹¹⁸

Classical ‘Lykourgan’ funerary practice was not all introduced at the same time. Burial near houses and sanctuaries was normal practice in Greece before c.700 BC, and was not so much introduced in Sparta as simply continued when other cities began to prohibit it. Lamenting mourners appear in late-seventh-century Spartan art and poetry, but their subsequent disappearance suggests that a ban on lamentation may have been introduced c.600. A rare archaic grave of about 600 BC still contained some pottery grave goods, but in the absence of securely attested later graves, it is possible that ‘naked’ burial and a ban on grave goods were introduced shortly afterwards. It was at about the same time that Solon imposed restrictions on lamentation and the use of cloth in burials at Athens.¹¹⁹ Special treatment for the war dead is first suggested by a series of large terracotta amphorae, dating to 625/600–550 BC.

They were elaborately decorated with images of ‘heroic’ warriors on chariots and sometimes also with ‘Homeric’ scenes of battle, and so probably marked the ‘conspicuous tombs’ which Tyrtaios had in mind when he listed the rewards of those who died in battle.¹²⁰ Whether these were private graves or public burials is not clear, but they were found in and around Sparta so that burial on the battlefield in the classical manner was evidently not yet practised.

The first attested battlefield burial is that of the 300 Spartans who fought the same number of Argives for control of Thyrea, c.546 BC. Our source says nothing about a grave for the casualties of the full-scale battle which ensued when champion combat proved indecisive (Paus. 2.38.5), so it is possible that the Spartans still observed a ‘Homeric’ distinction between outstanding warriors honoured with battlefield burial and other casualties taken home. A Spartan invasion of Attika in 512 BC led to the death ‘of many Lakedaimonians including Ankhimolios’, their general, ‘and the grave of Ankhimolios is at Alopeke in Attika’ (Hdt. 5.63): it sounds as if only the supreme commander was given burial near the battlefield. There was a monument at Sparta for some or all of those who had joined a colonizing expedition to Sicily led by Dorieus, c.510 BC, and had been massacred at Egesta: we cannot be sure about its nature, but a grave or a hero-shrine at their burial site is most likely.¹²¹ The first certain battlefield burial of all Spartan casualties occurred at Plataia.¹²² So far as we can tell, therefore, ‘Lykourgan’ regulations for the war dead – which probably included rules about eligibility to wear the red tunic – were not introduced until c.500 BC or even later and may well have been contemporary with the introduction of new, austere, wedding customs.

Inhumation and public burial on the battlefield were probably abandoned after the classical period. The famous story about a Spartan woman telling her son to come back with his shield ‘or on it’ is part of a small body of idealizing anecdotes and literary epigrams which imply that Spartan war dead were brought home to be cremated by their families.¹²³ None are of classical date, and it is likely that they reflect a change of practice in the hellenistic period. Archaeologically attested elaborate grave stelae and richly equipped chamber tombs from 200 BC onwards shows that the strict regulation of burial was abandoned at this time. Equality for the war dead may have been dissolved along with funerary austerity.¹²⁴

8.2.6 The display of wealth at sanctuaries and festivals

Sacrifices, dedications and participation at festivals were a final set of potential channels for the display of wealth. Xenophon encouraged anyone

contemplating the simplicity of Agesilaos' lifestyle to 'imagine how he feasted at the sacrifices, and hear how his daughter went down to Amyklai [to celebrate the Hyakinthia] in the public cart' (*Ages.* 8.7); at the same festival, Agesilaos took his place in the chorus alongside ordinary citizens, even after covering himself with glory in war (*Ages.* 2.17). The ideal suggested here is restraint in sacrificial meals, as well as participation in festivals on a basis of strict equality. Yet a good deal of evidence shows that sacrificial meals were exempt from the restrictions which applied to normal public dining in Sparta and that feasting at the Hyakinthia was particularly lavish ([Chapter 9](#)), so if Agesilaos' sacrifices were really as modest as Xenophon hints, they were the exception rather than the norm. It is certainly hard to believe Plutarch's idealizing claim that Spartans were allowed to make only small, cheap sacrifices (*Lyk.* 19.3; *Mor.* 228d). As for the making of private dedications in temples, this was common in the archaic period and fell out of use after c.500 BC, but, as we have already noted, the same development occurs across the Greek world and is no evidence of distinctive Spartan austerity.

More significant is participation in communal rituals at festivals. All Spartans were apparently expected to take part in choral singing and dancing at their own expense – whereas at Athens selected citizens formed choruses which were trained and costumed at the expense of a wealthy individual.¹²⁵ A hierarchy of positions existed within each chorus, and one's place was apparently determined by social status rather than by singing and dancing skills, so that wealth may have been a significant factor.¹²⁶ Since chorus members paid for their own costumes, differences in wealth might have been highly visible, too, unless festival dress was somehow regulated. At the greatest of all Spartan festivals, the *Gymnopaïdiai*, or 'naked dances', the radical solution adopted was reflected in the name itself: all male participants performed in the nude, wearing only spectacular headgear made of palm leaves.¹²⁷ But nudity was not the norm for all festivals, and it is conceivable that at other ritual occasions the normal public dress code did not apply, just as the normal rules for public dining were suspended. At least one form of display for boys is explicitly attested: at the Hyakinthia, some performed in choruses 'wearing hitched-up tunics', but 'others pass through the theatre mounted on decorated horses' (Polykrates *FGRH* 588 F 1 = *Ath.* 139ef). These boys on horseback must have belonged to the richest families, showing off their parents' wealth.¹²⁸

For women, or at any rate girls, festivals offered an opportunity for striking forms of display. Girls' choruses in archaic Sparta were lavishly dressed in purple clothes, gold jewellery and Lydian headdresses (Alkman fr. 1.64–70), and we have no reason to think that they were more restrained in the classical period. In the procession from Sparta to Amyklai to celebrate the Hyakinthia 'some of the unmarried girls are carried in expensively fitted carts; others take part in the procession while engaging in races with two-horse chariots'

(Polykrates *FGrH* 588 F 1). The carts (*kannathra*) were elaborate floats covered with wooden structures in the shape of griffins and other fabulous creatures (Plut. *Ages.* 19.5), and the existence of a public cart, on which Agesilaos made his daughter travel, implies that the other carts were privately paid for by wealthy families. The procession, in other words, made a display of distinctions between the least well-off – or most ostentatiously egalitarian – families whose daughters sat on the community float, the richer families whose daughters had their own floats, and the richest and most ambitious families whose daughters competed with the ultimate symbol of wealth, the racing chariot.¹²⁹

The greatest of all expenditures in the sphere of culture was of course the construction of monumental temples and cult statues – usually at public rather than private expense – and Thucydides commented on how limited such public building was in classical Sparta, by comparison to its rival Athens (1.10.2). In the late sixth century, by contrast, Sparta put up several stunning monuments, and was very much keeping pace with developments elsewhere. Around 550 BC, two colossal statues of Apollo, 45 feet tall and at least partially covered with gold, were erected to the north and south of the city. In the last quarter of the century, a new temple of Athena on the Akropolis had walls panelled with reliefs in bronze and was accordingly known as the ‘Bronze House’; a new temple of Apollo at Amyklai became famous for the god’s elaborate ‘throne’; and the so-called Skias for public meetings was constructed by one of the most famous architects of the age, Theodoros of Samos. In the fifth century, the only new monument was a stoa to commemorate victory over the Persians. Insofar as restraint in public architecture was part of Sparta’s effort to present itself as a place of austerity, it was a policy which did not emerge until after 500 BC.¹³⁰

8.3 Conclusion: The Double Life of Spartans

Quite apart from the difference between historical reality and the ‘mirage’ projected by our sources, classical Spartans in many ways lived a ‘double life’.¹³¹ First, it was a life of almost unrestricted acquisition of property and economic inequality, yet ostensible social equality and restrained display of wealth. Second, it was a life of public regulation but private freedom. Third and consequently, it was a quite heavily regulated public life for men but an almost unregulated private life for women. Finally, it was a life of austerity for boys, but material comfort and leisure for men – and allegedly outright ‘luxury’ for women.

Conspicuous spending on houses, clothes, weddings and funerals was subject to restrictions: a sumptuary law governing the woodwork of houses, but no other part of their construction or contents, may have been introduced around

600 BC; regulation of mourning and other aspects of funerals may have begun at about the same time. Painted pottery went out of use around 525, after which only black-glazed and plain pottery are attested; dedications at sanctuaries declined after c.500 BC. Probably around the same date, the dress of adult men was regulated insofar as tunics and cloaks worn in public were of a type associated elsewhere in Greece with the working classes. This restriction, and the customs of burying men without clothes, covered only with branches, and of dancing naked at the national festival of the Gymnopaïdai, wearing only crowns of palm-branches, may have been part of a concerted effort to reduce the significance of dress as a symbol of wealth, and to emphasize the importance of physical excellence. A ban on gold jewellery for women, if genuine, and an austere dress code for teenage boys, too, may have been part of this effort, but cannot be independently dated. Sometime between 600 and 500 BC, wedding processions were abandoned in favour of 'bride capture', which again downplayed any show of wealth in favour of a ritual display of physical prowess. The wedding feast was probably abolished when the public messes were introduced. Lavish public building ground to a halt at the end of the sixth century.

While subject to these limitations on the display of wealth, classical Spartans were also required to observe certain minimum standards. Most fundamentally, they needed to have enough income from land to be able to live a life of leisure, without engaging in manual labour, which appears to have become prohibited in the late sixth century. This leisure-class status was displayed not only in making compulsory contributions to their own and their sons' messes, but also in the distinctive hairstyle, shoes and staff, which were symbols of wealth rather than austerity in the Greek world. Similarly, a minimum standard was imposed on the battledress which citizens provided for themselves insofar as the wooden shields had to have a complete bronze facing, and tunics had to be red; beyond that there were apparently no other formal requirements or restrictions. The war dead, from about 500 BC onwards, received battlefield burial, an elite privilege elsewhere in the Greek world, but this was presumably paid for from public rather than private funds.

Some legitimate forms of display of wealth remained: there was no limit on how many domestic servants, horses or hounds anyone could own, provided that their use was shared with other citizens. We shall see in the next chapter that there was similar scope for displaying one's wealth in land and livestock by making voluntary additional contributions to the messes to be shared with less well-off members. Away from public life, in private houses, there was further scope for conspicuous consumption: how much of a private life adult men were able to enjoy is not clear, but the claim that Spartan women lived in luxury suggests that their lives were not subject to significant material restraints. Moreover, at some religious festivals wealth was displayed quite freely: in contrast to the egalitarian nudity of the Gymnopaïdai, the

Hyakinthia saw lavish private feasting (see [Chapter 9](#)) and allowed the sons and daughters of the rich to parade with their parents' horses, carriages and chariots.

Insofar as the introduction of the various restrictions and requirements can be dated, the first step was sumptuary legislation around 600 BC and the final developments occurred not long before 500 BC. As we shall see in [Chapter 9](#), the institution of the public messes with their culture of regulated eating and drinking is also most plausibly dated to c.500 BC, with earlier hints at approval for restraint beginning c.600 BC.¹³² The concentration of key changes at the very end of the sixth century suggests that the classical culture of austerity was largely the result of a programme of reform at this time, rather than of gradual development, even if it did not arrive wholly out of the blue. The link between these reforms and Lykourgos, a lawgiver who was supposed to have lived centuries earlier, was presumably forged from the start by those who instigated the changes: they will have claimed that they were not innovating but restoring ancient institutions and customs which had fallen into abeyance. They may very well have been the first to appeal to Lykourgos as their inspiration, since neither Alkman nor Tyrtaios nor any other source to our knowledge mentioned this lawgiver until Simonides did so in the early fifth century, and at the same time allusions in our sources suggest that there had been traditions about other Spartan lawgivers which faded from the record once the legend of Lykourgos took hold. The 'radicalization' of Lykourgos in the revolutionary propaganda of the late third century was thus not the first time the Spartans fundamentally rewrote their history: it had happened in the late sixth century as well.¹³³

A late dating of the reforms has implications for our understanding of its purpose. Scholars who date the 'Lykourgan' reforms, including the messes and at least some of the austerity measures, to c.650–600 BC do so largely because they regard these as serving an essentially military purpose: to prepare citizens for war by imposing on them a warlike lifestyle and creating unity against the enemy by granting equal power and status to all hoplites. On this view, the Second Messenian War seems to offer the most plausible catalyst for change, given the exceptional military effort involved in subjecting the Messenians and, crucially, keeping them subjected as helots afterwards.¹³⁴ Those scholars who date the emergence of a culture of austerity to the mid-sixth century do so largely on the grounds that the archaeological evidence shows no signs of Sparta being unusual before that date, but similarly connect the change to a process of militarization, either as a longer-term effect of the conquest of Messenia or as a more direct consequence of Sparta's wars against Arkadia and Argos and the need to consolidate military hegemony over the Peloponnese afterwards.¹³⁵ However, if the reforms took place later still, sometime during the reign of Kleomenes I, as we have found, they cannot plausibly be explained as motivated primarily

by military needs. By this time Messenia had been securely under Spartan control for a century, and Sparta's hegemony unchallenged for more than a generation. Around 500 BC, Spartan citizens were probably less intensively engaged in warfare than they had been at any time since they started their wars of conquest. There were still plenty of Spartan expeditions, but these were largely confined to leading coalition forces to intervene in civil conflict in allied and other cities.

The purpose of the reforms must therefore be sought elsewhere. A central goal of the 'Lykourgan' system was reflected in the name Spartan citizens gave themselves: *homoioi*, 'peers' or more literally 'similars'.¹³⁶ They defined themselves not by comparison to others – by claiming superiority as *aristoi*, for instance, or by stressing their greater freedom from labour as *eleutheroi* or their greater dedication to warfare as *hoplitai* or *machimoi* – but by their relation of near-equality to one another. The essence of this self-proclaimed equality, our sources seem to agree, was economic, while the only legitimate differences in status among citizens were based on personal merit and seniority. By limiting the display of wealth, according to Xenophon, and by instituting competitions in personal excellence, Lykourgos had ended rivalry for wealth and replaced it with 'the kind of rivalry dearest to the gods and most civic'.¹³⁷ For Theophrastos, the lawgiver's greatest feat had been to make property 'un-envied and un-wealth' by creating his culture of austerity.¹³⁸ Later still, Polybios (6.45) and Plutarch (*Lyk.* 8.2) agreed that Lykourgos had made all citizens economic equals to ensure that they would not compete with one another in wealth but only in merit.¹³⁹

Our idealizing and philosophically-minded sources vastly overestimated the extent to which the reforms succeeded in reducing economic inequality and suppressing competition for wealth, as was clear to Sparta's critics and as historical developments proved. But it is entirely plausible that greater social equality by means of removing opportunities for the display of economic inequality was indeed the primary goal of these late-sixth-century measures. We encounter similar problems and similar solutions across the Greek world, and, on the dates advocated here, these developments took place in Sparta at about the same time as elsewhere: the earliest sumptuary legislation around 600 BC has parallels in Athens and elsewhere, while a reduction of display is visible in material culture across Greece around 500 BC.¹⁴⁰ Spartan austerity was thus a response to a more general crisis, rather than to its own peculiar circumstances as a conquest state and hegemonial power. But these peculiar circumstances, which created an exceptionally high degree of economic inequality but also an exceptionally large leisure class, did mean that Sparta's specific solution was extreme.

The competitive monopolization of wealth which led to calls for a redistribution of land in the late seventh century created serious social inequality. The conquest of new land and labour in Messenia, c.600 BC,

alleviated this problem, and indeed enabled a large number of Spartans to live as leisured landowners; the subsequent conquest of Kynouria will have had the same effect. Given an exceptionally large leisure class, however, the rich needed to try proportionally harder to stand out by means of conspicuous consumption. When conquest stopped, c.550 BC, tension must therefore have escalated again as the rich got richer still while the less well-off fell into poverty. One symptom of, and partial solution to, this problem was the attempted colonization of new sites in Libya and Sicily; another, more successful, was probably ‘internal colonization’, the more intensive exploitation of Spartan territory, which survey archaeology has brought to light. A large region near Sparta which was archaeologically almost ‘empty’ began to produce a high density of finds after 550 BC.¹⁴¹ But the major solution was to inhibit competition in ‘luxury’ and reduce social tensions by creating an egalitarian culture through ‘austerity’ – and the common messes.

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NOTES

- 1 *Alkibiades* I.122e–123a; cf. *Hippias Maior* 283d. It seems likely that these dialogues are genuinely by Plato, which has been doubted: the absence of any notion of a ban on coinage suggests an early fourth-century date (see later below), and Plato’s *Republic* paints a similar picture of a great accumulation of hidden wealth in Sparta (548ab; see later).
- 2 Plut. *Lyk.* 5.6–10; cf. Justin 3.3.1–4; Polyb. 6.45. *Sayings of Lykourgos* (*Mor.* 226b–227a, nos. 2–6) presents redistribution of land, a ban on gold and silver currency, and the messes as his three main reforms. In *Instituta Laconica* (*Mor.* 236f–240b), Plutarch(’s source) mentions only the messes and other restrictions on display, omitting any hint of equalization of wealth. On ancient dates for Lykourgos, see Nafissi, this volume Ch. 4.
- 3 See further below nn. 134–5. An important exception to the current consensus is Thomas Figueira’s distinctive view on Sparta’s property regime: see this Work II, [Chapter 22](#).

- 4 Polybios 6.45; cf. 6.48; Justin 3.3.3; Plut. *Mor.* 226b; *Lyk.* 8.
- 5 Accepted (sometimes with the proviso that there must have been unequal private holdings alongside equally shared public land): e.g. Figueira (2004); MacDowell (1986), 89–110; Oliva 1972, 32–8, 188–93; Forrest 1968, 51. Rejected: esp. Hodkinson 2000; also e.g. Welwei 2004, 36–9; Cartledge 1979, 142–5; 1987, 166–70; Link 1991, esp. 80–1, 104–5; Nafissi 1991, 32–4; and already Grote 1851, 530–61.
- 6 See Van Wees 1999, 2–6.
- 7 Libya and Sicily: see later. Earlier conquests: van Wees 2003, 34–7, 48–53; cf. Luraghi 2008, 68–106; Kennell 2010, 43–5, 49–50.
- 8 Van Wees 1992, 299–310.
- 9 Hodkinson 1989, 82–9, esp. fig. 4.1 (p. 87). My calculation of the effect of pairing off the richest men and women is based on his Table 4.2 (p. 86). Cf. Hodkinson 2000, 400–5.
- 10 Plut. *Agis* 5; see Nafissi, [Chapter 4](#); Hodkinson 2000, 90–4; and see later.
- 11 See also Thuc. 1.6; Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 5.3; 10.7; *Hell.* 6.4.10–11; [Plato], *Alkib.* I, 122d; Ar. *Pol.* 1263a30–9, 1294b21–7; 1307a34–6. Detailed discussion: Hodkinson 2000, 19–35, 76–81.
- 12 So esp. Hodkinson 2000; cf. Kennell 1995; Flower 2002 for the further impact of (post-) revolutionary ideas on the image of archaic and classical Sparta.
- 13 Only Plut. *Mor.* 226b attributed a cancellation of debts to the lawgiver; this was omitted from his *Lykourgos*, and implicitly denied in his *Agis* (10).
- 14 Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.15, 17. The garbled text at 6.4.14 is usually emended from *hippoi* to *hippeis* to include an explicit reference to the king's guard, but even if we were to reject this, we would have to assume that the *hippeis* were present, since at this time they must have included almost all of Sparta's twenty- to twenty-nine-year-olds (about 30 per cent of the adult male population, i.e. only 330–90 in total), and it is inconceivable that this core fighting force was left at home.
- 15 Based on a demographic model: Coale's and Demeny's Model West, mortality level 4, growth rate 5.00, as advocated by Hansen (1986, 11–12; 1988, 21).
- 16 So Hodkinson 2000, 131–45: 45,000 ha in Laconia and 90,000 ha in Messenia.
- 17 Xen. *Hell.* 7.1.30, 4.20, 5.10: and see later, where it will be argued that this

new military organization was based on a number of *c.*700 citizens.

- 18 So Fuks 1962; Cartledge and Spawforth 1989, 42. Alternatively, one would have to assume that after Leuktra men who fell below the property threshold were nevertheless allowed to retain citizenship; that 600 of the 700 Spartiates in 243 BC were landless paupers; and that Plutarch's attribution to the other one hundred of 'land and an allotment' is redundant. Even if this were so, the rate of decline calculated below would not be affected.
- 19 That is, on the assumption that the richer men and women married one another: see earlier. The precise rates of decline are 1.5087 per cent p.a. (63.4 per cent over thirty years) if the decline was from 700 to one hundred, and 1.7019 per cent p.a. (59.8 per cent over thirty years) if the decline was from 900 to one hundred. I am indebted to Yoshie Sugino for help with these and subsequent calculations.
- 20 Link 1991, 82–3, and Lazenby 1995, 88–9, are right to reject the suggestion that Polybios' reference to an equal division of the *politikē chōra* (6.45.3) also implies distinct 'allotments': in context Polybios clearly means all 'citizen territory' as opposed to the land of *perioikoi*.
- 21 As noted by Hodkinson 2000, 49.
- 22 Link 1991, 92–5; Hodkinson 2000, 85–90.
- 23 The difference between *Politics* and *Constitution of the Lakedaimonians* on this subject is explained below.
- 24 Cf. Figueira 2004, 51–2, 65 (who, however, suggests that 'ancient lots' were genuinely ancient and that private land was a new category which emerged after 464 BC). Lazenby 1995 argues that the 'share' (*moira*) was not a piece of land but the share of produce which the Spartans received from the helots, but this is untenable: if the 'ancient share' was all the revenue which accrued to a Spartan landowner from his estates, the rule would entail a ban on buying and selling any home-grown produce, which clearly did not exist (and see later).
- 25 Concern with system before Leuktra: *Pol.* 1269b33, 1270a32–4. Awareness that indivisible lots were an innovation may explain his observation that exemption of citizens from the need to work is 'what the Lakedaimonians are *trying to achieve* even now' (*Pol.* 1264a9–11); note also 1271a27–38: 'he who first established' mess contributions as the 'ancestral qualification' for citizenship failed to prevent citizens from falling into poverty – as opposed, presumably, to the more recent legislators who had prevented this by creating indivisible allotments.
- 26 Isok. 12.179 (*c.*340 BC) says that after the conquest of Laconia 'an equal

share rightfully belonged to each man'; this may (but need not, *contra* Link 1991, 69) imply a notion that they *did* receive such shares. Isok. 6.20–1 refers to a transfer of land from royal to collective ownership, without any necessary implication that it was equally divided (*contra* Hodgkinson 2000, 69). As Ducat 1983, 152–6 pointed out, one cannot infer from Polyb. 6.45 that Ephoros believed in an equal distribution of land (but cf. Christesen 2010, 224–6, 240–1).

- 27 Paus. 3.2.5–7; 3.19.6; 3.22.6; see Thommen 2006; van Wees 2003, 48–53.
- 28 Hodgkinson 2000, 126; Ducat 1990, 57–9; Cartledge 1985, 43. Singor 1993, 51–4 suggests that it was a fifth-century institution.
- 29 If Plutarch gave the figures in Laconian measures (as for mess contributions, see [Chapter 9](#)), 82 *medimnoi* amounted to c.117 Attic *med.* (Hodgkinson 2000, 191–2) of 27.5 kg each, or c.3,200 kg. At an estimated yield of 640 kg per ha (Gallant 1991, 77; Hodgkinson 2000, 392), 5 ha (12.5 acres) would have been needed to meet the grain requirements of the citizen family. We need to add land to cover the wine and other produce delivered 'in proportion', plus land left fallow, and above all land needed to feed the helot cultivators, presumably at least a couple of families in each case, so surely nothing less than 15 ha in total will have sufficed; so already Beloch 1924, 304; cf. Oliva 1972, 49–50; Michell 1964, 223–8.
- 30 The only evidence for this is admittedly Tyrtaios fr. 6 West; cf. Pausanias 4.1.4.4; Aelian *VH* 6.1. Myron of Priene *FGrH* 106 F 2 (Athen. 657d) confirms that the helots paid a 'share' (*moira*) rather than a fixed amount, but does not specify the proportion. See esp. Hodgkinson 2000, 125–31; and for a critical view Luraghi 2008, 73–5.
- 31 According to Plut. *Ages.* 32.7. *Instituta Laconica* (*Mor.* 239e) was thus probably right to claim that it was prohibited (on pain of being cursed) to try to extract more tribute, and that the intention of the scheme was that the helot cultivators should be able to 'make a profit'.
- 32 An estate of 15 ha would have been enough to put the owner in the leisure class at Athens: see Foxhall 1997, 129–32; van Wees 2006a, 360–7.
- 33 *Mor.* 226cd; *Lyk.* 9.1; cf. Polyb. 6.45, 49.
- 34 *Mor.* 226d; *Lyk.* 9.2–5; see later. Polybios 6.49 discusses the drawbacks of the ban; Justin 3.2.11–12, like Xenophon, treats the ban as an anti-crime measure.
- 35 What follows in most respects adopts, with modifications, the views of Hodgkinson 2000, 154–82, but incorporates much of Figueira's views (2002) on the iron currency.

- 36 Hdt. 3.56 (Spartans allegedly bribed, c.525 BC); 3.148; 5.51; 6.82 (alleged attempts to bribe Cleomenes, in c.520, 500, 494 BC); cf. 6.86; 8.5. Note also legitimate acquisition of gold and silver: 6.79 (ransoms, 494); 9.81 (booty, 479); cf. Hodkinson 2000, 153–4, 171–2. Figueira 2002, 152, suggests that a ban on foreign coinage was imposed c.525–500 Bc.
- 37 Fines: Ephoros *FGrH* 70 F 193 (446 BC); Thuc. 5.63.2–4 (418); *pace* Figueira 2002, 150, it is unlikely that fines would have been expressed in terms of silver but paid in the form of (tonnes of) iron currency. Reward of silver: Thuc. 4.26.5. Greek silver: e.g. *IG* V.1.1 (Loomis 1992); Persian gold: e.g. Xen. *Hell.* 1.5.2–7. Hire of mercenaries, 424–418 BC: Thuc. 4.80.5; 5.67.1. Booty: e.g. Thuc. 8.28.3; Pritchett 1991, 404–16. See Hodkinson 2000, 167–70.
- 38 Plut. *Lys.* 16–17 (quotations: 17.2, 4); 19.4. Booty: Plut. *Nic.* 28.3 (Timaios *FGrH* 566 F 100b: 1,000 tal.); Diod. 13.106.8–9 (1,500 tal.); for the date, see Christien 2002, 174–9.
- 39 Flower 1991, 92, rightly says that it would be hard to enforce the ban unless all gold and silver were banned, since coins could easily be melted down; but the text is unambiguous and the ease of circumvention of the ban is surely one reason why it did not last: see later.
- 40 Plut. *Lys.* 19.4; cf. Poralla 1985, no. 380; Hodkinson 2000, 427.
- 41 Diod. 7.12.8; 14.10.2, reflecting Ephoros' views, says that Lysandros' booty was the first gold and silver coinage to enter Sparta; cf. Ephoros *FGrH* 70 F 205 (decree of 404/3). Ephoros cannot have attributed the ban to Lykourgos, since he dated the invention of coinage (FF 115, 176) several generations later than the lawgiver (FF 148.18, 173). *Inst. Lac.* 42 (Plut. *Mor.* 239ef) implies that a ban was introduced after an oracle warned kings Alkamenes and Theopompos, and this probably reflects Ephoros' view, since he evidently also cited the oracle in this context (Diod. 7.12.6), and like *Inst. Lac.* 42 unusually attributed to Sparta a 500-year hegemony, including naval hegemony (F 118 [Strabo 8.5.5]; Diod. 15.1.3 [but 400 years at 7.12.8]). See in detail Christesen 2010, 215, 247–8 n. 14; cf. Koiv 2003, 367–72.
- 42 A later date for Lykourgos, as in Aristotle (fr. 533 Rose), or an earlier date for Pheidon of Argos, as in e.g. Theopompos *FGrH* 115 F 393 and *Marmor Parium FGrH* 239.30, may have made Lykourgos contemporary with the invention of coinage. Ban explicitly attributed to Lykourgos: Polyb. 6.49; Justin 3.2.11–12; Plut. *Mor.* 226cd.
- 43 Deposit at Delphi and in Arkadia: Ath. 233ef (incl. Poseidonios *FGrH* 87 F 48c), with Hodkinson 2000, 166–7; Lipka 2002, 168.

- 44 Plut. *Pel.* 6.1, with *Ages.* 23.7–24.1; further literary and epigraphic evidence for use of silver currency in fourth-century Sparta: Hodkinson 2000, 170–6.
- 45 Weight: Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 7.5; and brittleness: Arist. fr. 481, 580 (= Pollux 9.77); [Plato], *Eryxias* 400ab, d; cf. Plut. *Lyk.* 9.1–2; *Lys.* 17.2; *Comp. Arist. et Cat.* 3.1; Polyb. 6.49. Note that those who argued for spits as the original form of money relied on weak evidence from etymology, not from the monetary use of spits at Sparta: Aristotle frs. 481, 580 Rose; cf. Herakl. Pont. fr. 152 Wehrli; cf. Plut. *Lys.* 17.5. Only Pollux 7.105 claims that the currency took the form of spits. On archaic ‘spits’, see e.g. Seaford 2004, 103–8.
- 46 Hesykh. s.vv. *pelanor*, *hipp(op)or*; Plut. *Mor.* 226d; Figueira 2002, 137.
- 47 Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 7.5. Maximum cartload of c.1,000 kg: Hodkinson 2000, 164. Classical silver:iron ratios, ranging from 1:100 to 1:480: Figueira 2002, 162 n.11.
- 48 Plut. *Mor.* 226d: weight of one Aiginetan mina, i.e. 620 gr if a hellenistic Aiginetan mina of 100 dr. is meant, rather than the classical mina of 70 dr. (see Hitzl 1996; van Wees 2013, 110–11). The context of this claim is more strongly than any other coloured by revolutionary propaganda (uniquely crediting Lykourgos with a cancellation of debts) and given to ‘overblown rhetorical generalizations’ (Hodkinson 2000, 46, who however excepts the information on coinage as ‘a nugget from a serious earlier treatise’). It is very unlikely that the Spartans would have rated their currency at only a tenth of its metal value (*pace* Figueira 2002, 138), and that Xenophon should have so far overestimated its value.
- 49 Figueira 2002, 137–9, 148, 160–1; cf. 151–2 for their suggested introduction c.510–490 BC.
- 50 Not only actual Aiginetan one-third obols (0.34 gr), but also Attic half- and quarter-obols (0.36 and 0.18 gr) and the silver coins weighing 0.4 gr or 0.2 gr found in their hundreds in a hoard from Asia Minor (*CH* 1.3, with discussion by Kim and Kroll 2008).
- 51 Most cities which did coin had to import the metal: Bissa 2009, 67–92.
- 52 Hdt. 2.167; see also e.g. Plut. *Mor.* 214ab and *Ages.* 26; Aelian *VH* 6.6.
- 53 Pigs bought in *agora*: Athen. 140b. Monetary contributions: [Chapter 9](#); the monthly sum of ‘about 10 Aiginetan obols’ was equivalent to 30 *pelanors*, i.e. one a day.
- 54 Hodkinson 2000, 84–5, 180; cf. Ducat 2006, 31–2. Note also the suspension of commercial business in the *agora* for three days to mark the

- death of a king: Arist. fr. 611.10.
- 55 Thessaly: Arist. *Pol.* 1331a30–b4. Sparta: also Hdt. 1.153; see Hodkinson 2000, 180–1.
- 56 Hodkinson 2000, 181; MacDowell 1986, 130–1.
- 57 Loans: Hdt. 6.59; Plut. *Mor.* 221f; *Ages.* 35.3. Records: Dioskourides *FGrH* 594 F 5 (Photios s.v. *skytalē*). Debt cancellation: Plut. *Agis* 13.2–3; *Kleom.* 10.6.
- 58 Paus. 6.4.4; their pupil Eukheiron of Corinth taught Klearchos of Rhegion, who taught Pythagoras of Rhegion, active c.475 BC; assuming 20/30-year intervals between supposed teacher and pupil gives c.570–530 for the Spartans. Other sculptors: Kratinos the Spartiate, c.620 at earliest (Paus. 6.9.4); Dorykleides the Lakedaimonian and Medon/Dontas the Lakonian, pupils of Dipoinos and Skillos, i.e. c.550 BC (Paus. 5.17.1–2; 6.19.12, 14; cf. Pliny *NH* 36.4); Theokles the Lakedaimonian, same date (Paus. 5.17.2); Lakonians Ariston and Telestas (Paus. 5.23.7); ‘local’ Gitiadas, 525–500 (Paus. 3.17.2); note also Gorgias, c.430 (Pliny *NH* 34.19). See Prost, [Chapter 6](#) this volume; Förtsch 2001, 78–81; Cartledge 1976, 117–18.
- 59 Cartledge 1976, 119, posits that even in the fifth century Spartans only felt ‘strong informal disapproval’ for crafts; a ‘legal prohibition’ developed later, by the time of Xenophon.
- 60 Plut. *Lyk.* 27.3–4; *Mor.* 238e. Similarly, an alleged ban on ‘all craftsmen concerned with the beautification of the body’ (*Mor.* 228b) is probably merely an inference from the tradition of restraint in personal appearance (*Mor.* 228a); see later.
- 61 Development of imports in Sparta: Cartledge 1979, 133–5; Holladay 1976. Alkman fr. 1.67–9 Page; Alkman was a contemporary of king Leotykhidas (fr. 5.2.col.ii), who ruled c.625–600 BC; testimonia which give him an earlier date are wrong; Schneider 1985.
- 62 See Prost, [Chapter 6](#), this volume, and surveys in Förtsch 1998; 2001; Fitzhardinge 1980; cf. Nafissi 1991, 236–53 (pottery).
- 63 Meticulously demonstrated for bronze offerings by Hodkinson 2000, 271–302; 1998.
- 64 See Förtsch 2001, esp. 43 n. 373; Cavanagh et al. 1996, 88. Note, however, the existence of Lakonian red-figure vase painting: Stroszeck 2006.
- 65 Plut. *Mor.* 997cd cites it among ‘the three laws’ (*en tais trisi rhētrais*): these three ‘lesser’ *rhētrai*, as also cited at *Lyk.* 13, were apparently the only recorded laws attributed to Lykourgos (along with the Great Rhētra:

- Lyk.* 6). For the terms of the law, cf. Solon's ban on using an axe to 'smooth' a funeral pyre: *Cic. De Leg.* 2.23.59.
- 66 *Plut. Mor.* 227c; *Lyk.* 13.4. *Mor.* 210e attributes a similar comment to Agesilaos.
- 67 Note that *Xen. Hell.* 6.5.27 speaks of 'houses filled with many good things' just outside Sparta. The comments on Spartan furniture and bedding at *Plut. Lyk.* 9.4 apply, I would argue, primarily to the furniture and bedding used in the public messes: this Volume, Ch. 9.2.2.
- 68 *Xen. Lak. Pol.* 1.4–9; *Plut. Lyk.* 14, explicitly rejecting Aristotle's view.
- 69 *Plato Alkib.* I.122d; *Plut. Ages.* 9.6.
- 70 The evidence is discussed in detail by Hodkinson 2000, 303–33.
- 71 *Xen. Lak. Pol.* 6.3; *Arist. Pol.* 1263a35–7; *Plut. Mor.* 238f; Hodkinson 2000, 199–201.
- 72 *Dion. Hal.* 20.13.2; the passage is noted by Redfield 1977, 158; Hodkinson 2009, 451, 484 (*contra* Hansen 2009, 396–400, 475–6); in a similar vein: Förtsch 2001, 25–8.
- 73 *Lak. Pol.* 11.3. Cf. *Plut. Mor.* 189e, 228f; *Lyk.* 22.2; *Lys.* 1.2.
- 74 Elaborate grooming: *Hdt.* 7.208.3, 209.3; *Xen. Lak. Pol.* 13.9; it is also clearly shown in Lakonian vase-paintings and bronze statuettes. Klearchos: Ktesias *FGrH* 688 F 28 (*Plut. Artax.* 18.1); going unkempt was a punishment for cowards: *Plut. Ages.* 30.3.
- 75 *Arist. fr.* 539 Rose = *Plut. Kleom.* 9.2. See further David 1992.
- 76 *Plut. Mor.* 189f, 230b, 232d.
- 77 *Plut. Lys.* 1: c.650 BC. *Hdt.* 1.82.8: c.550 BC.
- 78 See Förtsch 2001, 90–1; Link 2000, 11–15, 112.
- 79 See esp. *Theophr. Char.* 5 (21).9; also *Plut. Lyk.* 30.2; *Nik.* 19.4; cf. the Spartan use of a stick (*skytalē*) to convey official messages. Violent use: Hornblower 2000 (who, however, regards it as a symbol of officer-status rather than a regular part of citizen dress).
- 80 Comfort: *Arist. Wasps* 1158. Men's shoes: esp. *Thesm.* 142; *Ekk.* 74. Colour: *Pollux* 7.88; Stibbe 1972 no. 215 (pl. 71.3); for its connotations, see below on the *phoinikis*.
- 81 *Pollux* 7.88 (for 'free' men); *Hesych.* s.v. *amyklades* (α3838); cf. *Theokr. Id.* 10.35.

- 82 Ar. *Pol.* 1294b25–9 (rich and poor); *EN* 1127b26–9 (‘pretentious display’: *alazoneia*); Thuc. 1.6.4; cf. Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 7.3 and Aelian *VH* 9.34, both cited below; Justin 3.3.5.
- 83 *Tribōn* worn by poor: e.g. Arist. *Akharn.* 343; *Wasps* 1131–2; *Ekk.* 848–50; Isaios 5.11; by miserly: Theophr. *Char.* 22.13. Kritias and Xenophon (*Lak. Pol.* 2.4, 3.4, 7.3) used only the generic terms ‘cloak’ (*himation*) and ‘clothes’ (*himatia*), probably to avoid the negative associations of *tribōn*. Later sources for Spartan *tribōn*: e.g. Douris *FGrH* 76 F 14 (Athen. 535e); Plut. *Nik.* 19.4 (citing Timaios *FGrH* 566 F 100a); *Ages.* 14.2; cf. *Lyk.* 18.1, 30.2.
- 84 e.g. Losfeld 1991, 151–2. The ‘short wraps’ worn by Sparta-imitators in Plato (*Prot.* 342c) are not evidence for the Spartan *tribōn*: the humorous conceit here is that these people wrongly think Sparta is all about fighting and therefore look and dress like *boxers*.
- 85 Tassels: Arist. *Wasps* 476, with scholion on 475b, 476b. Red garments in Arist. *Lys.* 1138–4; scholion on Arist. *Wasps* 320; Hesykh. s.v. *puta* are probably military dress: see below.
- 86 Hesykh. s.v. *damophanēs* [δ209]; cf. Justin 3.3.5: ‘no one was to *go out* [*progredi*] better dressed than another’.
- 87 Xen. *Ages.* 8.6–9.5; *Hell.* 4.1.30. Sokrates: *Mem.* 1.6.2–10; cf. Plato, *Symp.* 220b.
- 88 So Ael. *VH* 9.34, citing Diogenes the Cynic (fr. 266 M). Worn by (Spartan) soldiers in art: Sekunda 1998, 21; Hodkinson 2000, 225.
- 89 See e.g. van Wees 1998a, 347–52; Geddes 1987.
- 90 Dirty tunics: Aelian *VH* 9.34; cf. Ar. *Birds* 1281–3; Plato *Com.* fr. 132 KA, cited above. A ban on grooming was a shameful punishment in Sparta: Plut. *Ages.* 30.4; Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 9.5.
- 91 Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 7.3. If it is true that public nudity was relatively common in Sparta (David 1989, but cf. Hodkinson 2000, 220–1), this may reflect the same principle.
- 92 Ar. fr. 542 Rose; Val. Max. 2.6.2 (explicitly tunics); Plut. *Mor.* 238f; Aelian *VH* 6.6. Lakonian hoplite statuettes (c.560–520 BC) wear tunics or nothing (Herfort–Koch 1986, 56–8, 115–19, pls. 10–20; nos. K127–8, 131–41), with the sole exception of one, c.520–500, wrapped in a full-length draped cloak, which cannot have been worn in battle (Wadsworth Athenaeum Museum, Hartford 1917.815; see Sekunda 1998, 10–11). See also below, at n. 115.

- 93 Incl. *perioikoi* and Spartan allies (Xen. *Ages.* 2.7; Plut. *Ages.* 19.5; implied at *Mor.* 193b), mercenaries (Xen. *Anab.* 1.2.16), and Athenians (Arist. *Peace* 1172–6: see below).
- 94 At Arist. *Peace* 1172–6, an Athenian officer is distinguished not by wearing a red tunic as such but by its ‘bright’ redness produced by high-quality ‘Sardian dye’. Different grades of red dye: Blum 1998, 32–4. Pre-battle grooming: Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 13.8; Hdt. 7.208–9. The use of an incised letter *lambda* (for ‘Lakedaimonians’) as the Spartan shield device (Eupolis fr. 394 K-A) is not compelling evidence for strict uniformity or for central provision of military outfits and equipment. The Spartan army brings along craftsmen, not spare equipment (Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 11.2); *contra* e.g. Kennell 2010, 155; Hodkinson 2000, 221–6; Cartledge 1977, 27.
- 95 Ath. 686f–687a; Plut. *Mor.* 228b; cf. *Mor.* 239c: alleged death penalty for inserting a (coloured) border into an otherwise cheap and rough garment (*sakkos*).
- 96 From age twelve, according to Plut. *Lyk.* 16.11–12; Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 2.3–4 is not explicit.
- 97 See Hodkinson 2000, 214–16; cf. Plato *Laws* 633c; Justin 3.3.5; Plut. *Mor.* 237b.
- 98 See [Chapter 9](#); the further explanation offered there for austerity in boys’ messes – the need to keep them as cheap as possible – is less effective for shoes and clothes.
- 99 Ibykos fr. 58 Page; later sources cited by Cartledge 2001, 114 with nn. 45–6.
- 100 Cf. Plut. *Lyk.* 15.3 (short hair); *Mor.* 228a (no ‘beautification’).
- 101 The same applies to a vase-painting of c.565 BC (Stibbe 1972, no. 191; pl. 58), which shows a female figure with long hair and an elaborate (Lydian) headdress: she is probably not a married woman, and the occasion is very probably a festival: see [Chapter 9](#).
- 102 E.g. Stibbe 1972, pls. 71.1, 80.1, 91.2, 111.1; with tassels: 78.1–2; Pipili 1987, figs. 9, 15; with tassels: 52, 92; Herfort–Koch 1986, pl. 20 (K135–6); Förtsch 2001, pl. 111.
- 103 The chronology is further complicated by Thucydides’ related claim about Sparta’s pioneering of athletic nudity (1.6.5): see McDonnell 1991, esp. 190.
- 104 Weddings: Sinos and Oakley 1993; Solon: frs. 71ab R (Plut. *Sol.* 20.6; Pollux 1.246).

- 105 Hdt. 6.65. A couple of other details of Plutarch's account are also confirmed by classical sources: cutting hair at marriage (Arist. fr. 611.13, see earlier) and the shame attached to being seen entering the marital bedroom (Xen. *Lak.Pol.* 1.5); cf. Hodkinson 2000, 230.
- 106 *Anth. Pal.* 7.19 (Alkman T3); Alkman frs. 4c and 107 may come from wedding hymns.
- 107 In Herodotos, the bride's father had already negotiated her marriage to Leotykhidas when Demaratos 'beat him to her capture' (6.65); for normal procedure, see e.g. Hdt. 6.57 (betrothal); Arist. *Pol.* 1270a25 (dowries); Lévy 2003, 84–9; Hodkinson 2000, 98–103.
- 108 For tension between personal merit and wealth in marriage, see Van Wees 2005; by contrast, Schmitz 2002 argues that the ritual served to deny legitimacy to family ties.
- 109 So Hodkinson 2000, 47, 98. Lévy 2003, 87, suggests instead that it may have been a ritual of sexual initiation which did not lead to marriage.
- 110 Phylarkhos *FGrH* 81 F 43 (Athen. 271ef); Aelian *VH* 12.43; cf. Plut. *Lys.* 2.1. For the status of *mothax*, see Hodkinson 2000, 355–6; 1997b; MacDowell 1986, 46–51.
- 111 Plut. *Lyk.* 27.1–2; *Mor.* 238d, with Hodkinson 2000, 246–7, on mourning and lamentation, and Cartledge 2012, on 'the Spartan way of death'.
- 112 *Lyk.* 27.2. Grave markers for 'holy women', most of whom died in childbirth: *IG V* 1.713–14, 1128, 1277; Brulé and Piolot 2004, 154–5. Markers of cenotaphs for men buried on the battlefield: e.g. *IG V* 1.701–10, 1124; Hodkinson 2000, 249–56; Low 2006, 86–91.
- 113 Den Boer 1954, 291; Richer 1994, 64–8; Hodkinson 2000, 258, 261–2; Ducat 2006, 94–100; Flower 2009, 206–7. It is unlikely that all the best fighters at Plataia happened to be 'priests', and among them Amompharetos was old enough to command a regiment (Hdt. 9.53), so surely not an *eirēn* (either a twenty-year-old or a twenty- to thirty-year-old); similarly, the polemarchs given special burial at Athens (see later) were c.thirty-three and fifty years old (Stroszeck 2006, 105). Emendation of *hierai* in Plut. *Lyk.* 27.2 is also to be rejected: Hodkinson 2000, 260–2; Brulé and Piolot 2004. Note the parallel use of *seios* (*theios*), 'godly', to denote outstanding men (Powell 1998, 126), and the relative commonness of hero-cults for recently deceased Spartans (Flower 2009, 212).
- 114 Stroszeck 2006, 103–4, 105–6 (cf. Hodkinson 2000, 257–9).
- 115 Stroszeck 2006, 104; Flower 2009, 218 n. 30; Kennell 2010, 154.

- 116 Plutarch's 'olive leaves' may (intentionally?) suggest a victory wreath, but clearly are not, because they cover the entire body: Hodkinson 2000, 247–8, *contra* Nafissi 1991, 292.
- 117 See Hodkinson 2000, 248–9; cf. Garland 1989; Blok 2006 on funerary legislation; Morris 1992, 128–49, on fifth-century funerary practice.
- 118 Burial: Pritchett 1985, 243–6. Oath: van Wees 2006b, 126–35. 'Elite' nature of battlefield burial: van Wees 2004, 145–6; Low 2006, 92–101. Perhaps the difficulty of repatriating the dead from distant locations was another factor in the decision to give battlefield burial to all in campaigns far from home, increasingly common after the late sixth century.
- 119 Lamentation: ivory plaques in Dawkins 1929, pls. cii.2–3; Tyrtaios frs. 7; 12.27. Grave(s): Hodkinson 2000, 238–40. Solon: van Wees 1998b, 22–33; Blok 2006.
- 120 Tyrtaios fr. 12.29. Terracotta vessels: Hodkinson 2000, 240–3; Förtsch 2001, 99–104.
- 121 Paus. 3.16.4; see Pritchett 1985, 161–3; Griffiths 1989, 63. An epitaph from Selinous (Plut. *Mor.* 217f; *Lyk.* 20.5), may but need not refer to Spartans buried abroad (Hdt. 5.46).
- 122 Burial at Thermopylae in 480 was arranged by the Amphiktyons, not Sparta (Hdt. 7.228). Stelae for war dead buried abroad begin c.450: Hodkinson 2000, 250–1.
- 123 Aelian *VH* 12.21; Plut. *Mor.* 235a, 241acf; *Anth. Pal.* 7.229, 434–5.
- 124 Archaeological evidence: Hodkinson 2000, 256 (rejecting the literary evidence as fictional: 253–4). Nafissi 1991, 290–309, argues that battlefield and home burial existed side by side in the classical period.
- 125 See Flower 2009, 207–11; Lipka 2002, 177–8; Parker 1989, 149.
- 126 Plut. *Mor.* 149a; 191f; 208d; 219e; Diog. Laert. 2.73: a good performance can overcome the stigma of a low position; Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 9.5: lowest positions given to cowards.
- 127 Sosibios *FGrH* 595 F 5 (Ath. 678b); see David 1989, 6; Flower 2009, 210–11. The palm-leaf headgear was called a 'Thyreatic crown', a reference to Sparta's victory over Argos at Thyrea, c.546 BC: if this is not later invention, it may indicate that ritual nudity at this festival was introduced in the late sixth century (not necessarily immediately after this event).
- 128 On Polykrates, see next note. The mysterious 'rider' figures in archaic Lakonian art (Pipili 1987, 76) are conceivably boys parading on horseback

at the Hyakinthia.

- 129 Polykrates' account is of Hellenistic date, but the *kannathra* evidently already featured c.400 BC, and the chariots need not be later additions. On the Hyakinthia, see Richer 2004.
- 130 Apollo statues: Paus. 3.10.8; 3.19.2–4, with Hdt. 1.69. For monumental buildings and their dates, see e.g. Förtsch 2001, 46–9 (also 51), 78–81; Pipili 1987, 80–2.
- 131 I borrow the phrase from Förtsch 2001, 25–8; cf. Redfield 1977, 158 ('double man').
- 132 The 'austere' messes are dated some time after c.550 BC by Thommen 1996, 44–7, 71–4; 2003, 48–9; Powell 1998, 128–38; Rabinowicz 2009, 165.
- 133 Simonides fr. 628 Page; cf. Nafissi, [Chapter 4](#), this volume. Military institutions attributed to Timomakhos: Ar. fr. 532 Rose; older Dorian origins: Pindar, *P.* 1.61–6; *I.* 9.1–6; fr. 1; Hellanikos *FGrH* 4 F 116. Rewriting history: Powell, [Chapter 1](#), this volume; Flower 2002.
- 134 E.g. Forrest 1968, 58; de Ste Croix 1972, 89–94; Redfield 1977, 148; Link 1998, 104–5; 2000, 11–17; Meier 1998, 67–9; 2006, 120–2; cf. Cartledge 1979, 117 (equality, not austerity).
- 135 So e.g. Finley 1968; Ehrenberg 1933. Also Förtsch 2001, 7–9, 15–19, 113–5; Nafissi 1991, 99–100, 225–6, 347; Cartledge 1979, 134, stressing long-term consequences of Messenian conquest. Same date but without military explanation: Hodkinson 2000, 2–4; cf. 1997a.
- 136 See Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 13.1, 7; *Anab.* 4.6.14; implied at e.g. Hdt. 7.234.2; Thuc. 4.40.2, 126.5. Meaning of *homoioi*: e.g. Cartledge 2001, 71–4; Flower 2002, 196–7; and n. 139, below.
- 137 Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 4.5; cf. 4.2–4; 7; 10.
- 138 fr. 78 Wehrli: a great feat 'to have made wealth un-envied (*azēlon*), as Theophrastos says, and un-wealth (*aplouton*) by means of the commonality of the meals and cheapness of the diet' (Plut. *Lyk.* 10.2). I regard the whole passage as a quotation from Theophrastos, and the version at *Mor.* 226ef as a truncated paraphrase.
- 139 Seniority: esp. Hdt. 2.80 and e.g. Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 5.8. The emphasis on competition in merit counts against the view of Meier 2006 that *homoioi* were above all 'equals' in military prowess, but he is right to argue against Thommen 1996, 51, 136–7, that the label cannot have been created to distinguish Spartiates from *perioikoi*.

- 140 See e.g. Rabinowicz 2009, esp. 167; Fisher 1989, 39; 43; Redfield 1977, 153–8. On egalitarian material culture also Morris 1992, 128–55; 1998, 31–6, 74; Osborne 2009, 294–7.
- 141 Cavanagh et al. 1996, 33–89; 2002, 151–256, esp. 233–8; Kennell 2010, 52.

For Bibliography, see end of [Chapter 9](#).

CHAPTER 9

The Common Messes

Hans van Wees

Communal dining was at the heart of the classical Spartan lifestyle. An adult man spent every evening with the same small group of companions at dinner in a public mess hall. Attendance was compulsory, and if a man could not afford to make the prescribed contributions of food, wine and money, he lost his status as citizen (Ar. *Pol.* 1271a27–37). Spartan boys also dined together in small groups, as part of their public education, without which they would be ineligible for citizenship in the first place. Sharing meals was an important part of what made citizens ‘equal’ or at any rate ‘similar’, and it was integral to the culture of austerity since the men were said to eat and drink in moderation while boys were on little more than a starvation diet. Hence Athenian ‘Lakonomaniacs’, according to Aristophanes in our earliest reference to Sparta’s unusual dining customs, made a habit of ‘going hungry’ (*Birds* 1281–3).

Some ancient sources suggest that austere dinners in public messes served primarily military purposes: they organized men for war and prepared them for its hardships. Modern scholars have often followed suit and interpreted the creation of common messes as part of a process of militarization which Sparta supposedly underwent sometime between 650 and 550 BC.¹ Insofar as the messes fostered small-group solidarity, they might certainly have been an asset in war. But a close study of men’s and boys’ messes indicates that neither the specific organization of the messes nor their particular ethics of commensality were particularly suited to the demands of warfare. Moreover, the archaic evidence for Spartan dining customs is incompatible with the creation of the classical system as early as 550, let alone 650 BC. We shall see that the classical messes were introduced only at the very end of the sixth century, and that their main purpose, like that of the culture of austerity in general, was to minimize tensions created by economic inequality within Sparta. The messes helped curb aggressive behaviour by the elite, while restricting and channelling the scope for display of wealth and creating institutional opportunities for the less well-off to assert equality by displays of personal merit. In doing so, they addressed social problems not peculiar to Sparta but common across the late archaic Greek world.

9.1 The ‘Finest’ Reform (Plut. *Lyk.* 10.1): Legendary Origins of the Messes

Most ancient authors called the public messes either *syssitia*, the generic Greek word for ‘dining groups’, or *phiditia*, if they used the technical Spartan term. Yet Xenophon, the earliest source to use the Spartan word, and a well-informed contemporary, called them *philitia*.² *Phiditia* was thought to derive from *pheido*, ‘to be sparing’, and to allude to the messes’ famous austerity (Plut. *Lyk.* 12.1). *Philitia*, by contrast, were ‘groups of friends’, so if Xenophon was right the name referred not to drinking or eating or austerity but to the forging of harmonious relationships – presumably in order to overcome mutual hostility.

The legend of the origins of the messes points in the same direction. As Plutarch tells the story, wealthy Spartans had put up with Lykourgos taking their land and confiscating their money, but when he instituted compulsory dining in public messes, they rioted and nearly stoned him to death (*Lyk.* 11; *Mor.* 227ab). One hot-headed youth, Alkandros, struck him in the face with a staff and took out his eye. His punishment was to serve Lykourgos ‘in silence’ as his personal attendant, and thus this ‘wicked, wilful youth’ was transformed into a ‘very well-attuned and most decorous man’ (*Lyk.* 11.2–4). This story of violent protest surely goes back to a time when the messes were still regarded as Lykourgos’ most radical institution, i.e. before the late third century BC when the redistribution of land and confiscation of gold and silver were first attributed to him.³ The main point is Alkandros’ educational experience, which corresponded to the role of youths at the messes: they were not yet members, but did attend, presumably in a subordinate role, and were discouraged from speaking (Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 3.5). The story concludes by adding that the Spartans at this time stopped carrying staffs in meetings of the assembly (Plut. *Lyk.* 11.4). The foundation legend suggests that a key function of the messes was precisely to eliminate the impulsive violence which it illustrates. We shall see that a number of dining practices did indeed serve that purpose.

One further element of the foundation story may have been that Lykourgos originally incorporated 9,000 citizens into the messes. This is the number given by Plutarch for the lots of land distributed by Lykourgos (*Lyk.* 8.3; 16.1), which at first glance suggests that it was invented as part of the revolutionary propaganda of the late third century.⁴ But the revolutionaries actually claimed that the lawgiver assigned 4,500 or 6,000 lots, as they themselves did, and that another 4,500 or 3,000 lots had been added later by king Polydoros after the conquest of Messenia (*Lyk.* 8.3). It would have been pointless to muddy the propagandistic waters by speculating about how many lots might once have been added and then lost again:⁵ these claims only make sense if revolutionary propaganda had to take into account an older, well-

established tradition that Lykourgos created 9,000 citizens.

Classical sources do indeed suggest familiarity with this tradition. Aristotle, in the course of complaining that the Lykourgan system led to a severe reduction of manpower, says that ‘under the early kings’ there had been 10,000 Spartiates – implying that after Lykourgos’ reform there were always fewer than this (*Pol.* 1270a15–b6). Herodotos has a Spartan king say in 480 BC that there were ‘very approximately 8,000’ Spartiates, in answer to the question how many Lakedaimonians there were, and ‘how many of these are of the same quality in warfare’ as those who fought at Thermopylai (7.234.1–2). These 8,000 thus most probably represent the number of Spartiates of military age (twenty to fifty-nine),⁶ and given that about 10 per cent of the adult male population would be aged sixty or over, a total number of c.8,900 adult males is implied. Rather than assume, as many scholars tacitly do, that Herodotos had somehow penetrated the Spartiates’ notorious secrecy about their manpower and discovered their numbers fifty years before his own time, we should conclude that his figure of ‘very approximately 8,000’ soldiers was a plausible estimate based on the tradition that Lykourgos created 9,000 citizens in total. Herodotos was led to believe – wrongly, as we shall see – that this original number of citizens was still maintained at the time of the Persian Wars.

Since the tradition of an egalitarian redistribution of land by Lykourgos was invented only in the late third century, the older tradition that Lykourgos created 9,000 citizens must have referred instead to the lawgiver including 9,000 men in the system of public messes.⁷ We will consider the historical implications of this story later.

9.2 Forms of Commensality in Classical Sparta

9.2.1 *The common messes: organization*

The messes ‘met in groups of fifteen or slightly fewer or more than that’, according to Plutarch (*Lyk.*12.2) who probably drew on Aristotle for this information. Several sources say that a mess group functioned as a military unit. Plato claims that Spartan and Cretan messes served a military purpose and dined together on campaign (*Laws* 625d, 633a); Herodotos lists ‘sworn bands (*enōmotiai*), thirties (*triēkades*) and messes (*syssitia*)’ as the ‘military institutions’ established by Lykourgos (1.65.5).⁸ The ‘sworn band’ was the smallest unit in the Spartan army, comprising thirty-two or thirty-six men aged twenty to fifty-five at Mantinea and Leuktra, respectively.⁹ A mess group of fifteen men ought thus to have formed a subdivision of a ‘sworn

band’.

From the late fifth century onwards, at the latest, it seems clear that a single mess group did indeed form the citizen core of a ‘sworn band’, the rest of which was made up of *perioikoi*.¹⁰ The late-fourth-century figure of *c.*15 men per mess corresponds closely to the number of Spartan citizens per sworn band after Leuktra. Xenophon implies that after this battle only 700 Spartiates survived and that the number of sworn bands was halved, from ninety-six to forty-eight.¹¹ This amounts to 14.8 citizens per unit, exactly the size of a mess group. (Only thirteen members of this mess group, on average, would be aged twenty to fifty-five and serve actively in the sworn band.) Before Leuktra, there had been *c.*1,100 citizens and ninety-six sworn bands, i.e. 11.5 per mess group, or ten per sworn band, forming barely 30 per cent of the unit.¹² Previously, in 425 BC, 40 per cent of hoplites were full Spartiate citizens,¹³ i.e. thirteen men in a band of thirty-two, which is precisely the average number of men aged twenty to fifty-five one would find in a mess group of fifteen.

It may be a coincidence that the post-Leuktra mess size of fifteen is the same as that attested *c.*425 BC, but the figure is consistent with a seating arrangement of fourteen men reclining in pairs on seven couches, plus one man seated on ‘the folding stool’ (*skimpodion*), to which Persaeus referred in his *Lakonian Constitution* (FGrH 584 F 2; see further below). Seven couches were standard for a modest Greek dining room, and Alkman already described a feast featuring precisely that number (fr. 19 Page). The Spartan mess was therefore probably of the same size as a normal Greek symposium party, and fifteen members was always the norm.¹⁴ If so, the rapid decline of citizen numbers will have entailed frequent restructuring of both the public messes and the Spartan army, reducing the number of mess groups and sworn bands in order to bring individual units back up to their ideal strength. The halving of the number of army units and messes after Leuktra to compensate for heavy recent losses as well as long-term manpower decline will have been only the latest instance of this process.¹⁵

At an earlier stage, during the Persian Wars, *perioikoi* were not yet integrated into the army (Hdt. 9.10–11, 28) and a ‘sworn band’ necessarily consisted entirely of citizens. Herodotos’ listing of ‘sworn bands, thirties and messes’ (1.65.5) strongly suggests that the mess-group of fifteen men was the basic unit, two of these combined to form a ‘thirty’, and three messes formed a sworn band of much the same size as it was later (about thirty-eight of the forty-five men would have been aged twenty to fifty-five). In a sworn band of three mess-groups, a ‘thirty’ may have been the unit that took the field in a two-thirds mobilization, which seems to have been common.¹⁶ If the messes originally included 9,000 citizens, Sparta would have had 600 mess-groups, 300 ‘thirties’ and 200 ‘sworn bands’, and the ‘thirties’ might also have played a role in providing one man from every unit to constitute the elite bands of

300 attested during the Persian War (Hdt. 7.205) and the Messenian revolt of 464 (9.64). It was probably after this revolt that the *perioikoi* were merged into the Spartiate army,¹⁷ so that subsequently a sworn band contained only one mess-group and the ‘thirties’ disappeared. After Herodotos no one mentioned them again.

Classical sources say very little about how the members of a mess were recruited. Unlike a normal Greek symposion at which the host tended to invite men of his own age, in Sparta each mess included members of widely different ages.¹⁸ Demography implies that on average once every two years a mess would be joined by a new member who had just come of age.¹⁹ The admission procedure described by late sources involved co-optation by a secret ballot which might have led to the selection of members of the same family or men of similar social and economic status.²⁰ Yet this is not what happened. Xenophon’s account of the decimation of a Spartan regiment at Lechaion in 390 BC mentions the fathers, sons and brothers of the dead who were serving at the same time in other regiments (*Hell.* 4.5.10). If they belonged to different regiments they must also have belonged to different messes: recruitment evidently cut across kinship ties. The unit got into trouble as it escorted home the men from Amyklai ‘from the entire army’ (4.5.11), so regiments and their subdivisions were not recruited on a local basis either. Recruitment of kin and neighbours may not have been absolutely banned, but it seems that the messes made a policy of cutting across such ‘organic’ relationships.

Mess membership also appears to have crossed the economic divide between the richest citizens and the less well-off – no one who could afford the mess contributions was ‘poor’. No text explicitly says so, but it is hard to conceive of an army in which some units consisted only of rich men, and, as we shall see, it was customary for ‘the rich’ to make special contributions to the meal, which makes best sense if each mess contained a mixture of economic statuses. In the boys’ messes a mingling of ‘rich’ and ‘poor’ is explicitly attested (see further below). Perhaps the discretionary admission procedure described by later sources did not yet exist in the classical period, or, if it did, the members’ freedom of choice may have been restricted by rules or moral pressure which demanded recruitment from different social classes.

It is often assumed that this principle of recruitment was not introduced until the mid-fifth century. Herodotos spoke of a ‘Pitanate regiment’ at the battle of Plataia (9.52.2–3), and since Pitana was one of the ‘villages’ which made up the town of Sparta this appears to show that in 479 BC Spartan military units and messes were still organized on a local basis. Moreover, Aristotle reported (fr. 541 Rose) that the Spartan army had once consisted of five regiments, which could correspond to the five ‘villages’ of Sparta, if one includes Amyklai.²¹ However, Thucydides stated emphatically that a ‘Pitanate regiment’ had ‘never existed’ (1.20.3), and none of Aristotle’s units was

called ‘Pitanate’ or named after any of the other villages. Instead, the regiments’ names were poetic titles expressing martial prowess, reminiscent of the names of Roman legions: *Edōlos*, ‘Devourer’, *Sinis*, ‘Ravager’, *Arimas*, ‘Hell-bent’, *Plōas*, ‘Thundercloud’ and *Messoagēs*, ‘Leader of the Centre’.²² Such artificial names suggest formal units that were not based on local or kinship ties. Fivefold army divisions are also found outside Sparta, and may have been a common form of military organization.²³ Since ‘Pitana’ was used in poetry as a metonym for ‘Sparta’, Herodotos may simply have taken too literally a poetic account of the battle of Plataia, which by ‘Pitanate regiment’ meant ‘Spartan regiment’.²⁴ We are left with no reason to think that the Spartan army of the Persian Wars was organized on a local basis: public messes and military units were probably already recruited on the boundary-crossing principles that we encounter in the fourth century.

If messes were indeed called *philitia*, ‘groups of friends’, the name perhaps signalled not only that their goal was to create harmonious relations but also that friendship was the only tie that bound them together. The absence of any other ties of kinship or community may have made it seem necessary to impose the oath of loyalty which united messes in ‘sworn bands’. Whereas Athenians in their Ephebic Oath swore loyalty to their comrades, however, Spartans probably swore loyalty to their commanders – ‘I shall not leave my regimental commander or the leader of the sworn band, whether he is alive or dead’ – and the emphasis on hierarchy is striking.²⁵ In any case, the function of mess groups as units in war, with officers and file leaders, is bound to have entailed more hierarchical relationships within the Spartan dining group than within the normal Greek drinking group, which played no role in war.

9.2.2 The common messes: ethics of commensality

Dining in the classical messes took a distinctive form, of which the philosopher Dikaiarkhos’ *Tripolitikos*, c.300 BC, gave the most informative account (fr. 72 Wehrli = Ath. 141 ac):

First, the meal is served to each man separately, and there is no sharing of anything with anyone. Next, beside each man is placed as much barley cake as he wants, and also a mug (*kōthōn*) to drink whenever he feels like it. The *opson* is always the same for everyone, boiled pork, and sometimes [...] small [...] weighing a quart at most, and nothing other than that, except the broth made from the meat, which is enough to pass round to everyone throughout the entire meal, and maybe an olive or cheese or a fig, or if they receive an extra donation a fish, hare, wood-pigeon or the like. Then, when they have eaten quickly, afterwards the items called *epaikla* are passed round.

He went on to give details of the mess contributions, which are supplemented by Plutarch (*Lyk.* 12.2): per month, each Spartan contributed one Lakonian *medimnos* of barley, eight Lakonian *choes* of wine, five minae of cheese, 2.5 minae of figs, and ten Aiginetan obols in cash to buy *opson*, i.e. meat or fish. All this information probably derived ultimately from Aristotle.²⁶

Despite the philosopher's best efforts to make the meals seem austere, Spartans consumed generous quantities of a variety of foods. Modern scholars often speak of 'rations', but Dikaiarkhos reveals that diners were not restricted to fixed quantities of barley or wine: they could ask for as much as they liked. Xenophon similarly notes that 'the table is never empty' (*Lak. Pol.* 5.3–4), and Kritias reports that a Spartan's cup was always full: 'each drinks from the cup set beside him, and whatever amount he has drunk the slave who pours the wine [tops up]' (fr. 33 = *Athen.* 463f). The members' contributions of barley and wine imposed no real restriction on how much a man could consume: they amounted to 2.5 litres of barley (with a nutritional value of 5,300 calories) and 1.25 litres of wine (880 calories) per man per day, more than the largest attested daily rations and well above even the highest recommended modern energy requirement. The other contributions were much more modest, but still amounted to 70 gr of cheese and 35 gr of figs a day, while the money for *opson* would have been enough to buy one boar, two sows or a dozen piglets per month and supply the mess with a substantial quantity of meat and the notorious 'black broth'.²⁷ The diet was plain: barley, not wheat; locally produced wine, not imported vintages; pork only, no other meat or fish. The black broth, also known as 'blood soup' (*haimatia*) or 'dip sauce' (*bapha*), was boiled from the remainder of the slaughtered pig, mainly its blood, to which nothing was added but salt and vinegar.²⁸ But the amount and range of food and drink easily offset the plainness of these meals, which by the standards of all but the wealthiest Greeks were far from austere.

What is more, the basic regulation dinner was followed by the so-called *epaiklon*, 'supplementary meal'. Dikaiarkhos quickly skips over this, but the custom is alluded to by Xenophon and others, all of whom mention wealthy men making donations of wheaten bread, rather than barley, while authors from the third century onwards also have the rich contributing 'seasonal produce from their farms', including meat, all produced and prepared at home, not bought. Perhaps the latter contributions were a later development, though it is just as likely that Xenophon chose to omit them in order to play down the role of wealth as far as possible. Hunting parties contributed meat from their catch; only hares and fowl (geese, thrushes, blackbirds, wood-pigeons, turtle-doves) are mentioned. Fish was also donated; whether it was caught or bought is unclear. Further delicacies may have included 'honeyed poppyseed and crushed linseed' which were smuggled into Sphakteria for the Spartan soldiers trapped there, along with staple mess foods such as grain, wine and cheese (*Thuc.* 4.26.5, 8).

The *epaiklon* was a step away not only from ‘austerity’, but also from the notional equality of mess mates since in each case the prowess of individual hunters or generosity of donors was advertised by calling out their names.²⁹ This custom makes most sense if the very rich and the relatively poor mingled in the same messes, so that the former by this means redistributed some of their wealth and won the favour of their mess mates.³⁰ None of our sources are entirely explicit on this point, but Athenaios comes close when he describes *epaikla* as ‘supplied for the *phiditia*-members by one of the rich, or sometimes several’.³¹

Despite the generous amounts of wine available, all our sources stress Spartan moderation in drinking, which was evidently a matter of collective restraint rather than rationing. Kritias and Xenophon contrast the absence of pressure to drink in Spartan messes with the culture of drinking at symposia elsewhere in Greece, where the habits of toasting and passing round cups entailed competitive, compulsory and excessive drinking. The noisy drunken procession through the streets, the *kōmos*, which typically followed a symposium, was banned in Sparta, where men of military age were obliged to make their way home from the messes in darkness, without a torch.³² In Spartan messes, one found ‘the least *hybris*, the least drunkenness, the least shameful behaviour and shameful talk’ anywhere in Greece (Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 5.6). This ethic lends credibility to later claims that helots were forced to make drunken fools of themselves at festivals and in messes as a warning against heavy drinking.³³ The entertainment at mess dinners was accordingly restrained. According to Xenophon, it consisted of serious conversation about ‘some noble deed that someone in the *polis* may have done’ (*Lak. Pol.* 5.6). Other authors admit that diners also engaged in light-hearted banter, but stress that Spartans were taught from boyhood not to let this escalate into quarrels or fights: a true Spartan put up with ridicule in good humour, and stopped mocking others before he went too far. This culture of restraint in drinking and joking suggests that a major purpose of the messes was to contain the sort of violent, arrogant behaviour with which drunken symposiasts tended to treat fellow-drinkers and outsiders alike.³⁴

Our sources do not say whether music was part of the entertainment in the messes, as customary at Greek symposia. The singing of a paean at the start of the meal is the only music explicitly attested as performed in the messes at home, but this was a religious ritual rather than part of the entertainment, as was the habit of wearing of wreaths during dinner – two customs which the Spartans had in common with other Greeks.³⁵ Aristotle claimed that Spartans did not learn to play instruments, and Plutarch, who tried to defend the Spartans from charges of philistinism, could do no better than cite choral songs performed at festivals and songs sung on campaign, all of which had simple and warlike texts, melodies and rhythms.³⁶ So perhaps there was little music at classical Spartan dinners.

A conspicuous element of relative austerity was the use of ceramic rather than metal tableware. This is explicitly noted only by Polemon in the second century BC,³⁷ but confirmed by Dikaiarkhos' reference to the 'mug' (*kōthōn*) from which Spartans drank in the messes. This kind of mug, 'round, small-eared and fat-bellied', has been convincingly identified with one type of black-glaze pottery vessel found in classical Sparta.³⁸ Since drinking cups tended to be among the most precious items of tableware, the other vessels used in the messes were surely also black-glazed pottery. A further hint at comparative simplicity of tableware is the observation in Eratosthenes' *Letter to Agetor the Lakonian* that in the past people used clay vessels, and did not use a ladle to transfer wine from mixing-bowl to pouring-vessel, but dipped a pouring-vessel called *kymbion* directly into the mixed wine, 'as they do even now in the messes in your country'.³⁹ Elsewhere in classical Greece, gold, silver and bronze tableware were an integral feature of elite symposia, so the exclusive use of pottery was a powerful sign of material moderation in Sparta.

The choice of the *kōthōn*-mug as the standard drinking vessel in the public messes is remarkable because outside Sparta it was associated with two things: outdoor use, mainly by soldiers, and heavy drinking. Kritias stressed the special qualities of the Spartan version:

The Lakonian *kōthōn* is a drinking vessel most suitable for campaigning and easiest to carry in a kit-bag. Why it is of military use is that it is often necessary to drink water that is not pure. First, there is the fact that one cannot see too clearly what one drinks; secondly, since the *kōthōn* has ridges, that which is not pure stays behind in it.⁴⁰

Kritias may have exaggerated the superiority of the Lakonian over other Greek *kōthōnes*, but there are no grounds for the modern suggestion that he unduly 'militarized' Spartan tableware. The *kōthōn* really was compact and sturdy, and curved inwards towards the top before flaring out again, giving it a wide lip and distinctive internal 'ridge' which both obscured the contents of the vessel and prevented the dregs at the bottom from flowing out – in stark contrast to the wide and shallow wine-cups commonly used in Greece.⁴¹ It is highly plausible that the *kōthōn* was primarily designed for drinking water from natural sources. Anyone 'on the road', especially a soldier on the march, was of course liable to use their water mug also as a wine-cup, and in this secondary role the deep and voluminous *kōthōn* came to be associated with hard drinking, especially of unmixed wine.⁴² The adoption of the *kōthōn* at the messes thus reinforces the impression that there were no restrictions other than self-restraint on Spartan public drinking, and that eating and drinking were presented as strictly utilitarian, rather than as an opportunity for competitive display of wealth and leisure: each man drank as much as he wanted, and no more, from his own all-purpose mug.

Kritias also praised Lakonian 'couches, chairs and tables' for their simple but

fine craftsmanship (F 88 B 34 D-K; Plut. *Lyk.* 9.4), presumably above all with reference to the furniture used in the messes: hence the claim attributed to Lykourgos that the purpose of the messes was ‘so that the rich man may in no respect have any more than the poor man, be it drink or food, bedding or furniture, or anything else’.⁴³ ‘Bedding’ here must refer to the mattresses and cushions spread over couches to make reclining more comfortable. Phylarkhos claimed that after 300 BC Spartans started using such luxurious bedding in the messes that visiting strangers hardly dared to recline, whereas in the old days the Spartans ‘endured a bare couch throughout the meeting’ (FGrH 81 F 44), but this is likely to be an exaggeration for rhetorical contrast.⁴⁴ Classical Spartans in their messes probably reclined on couches covered with a mattress and cushions just as other Greeks did.

Seating arrangements introduced an element of hierarchy among the conspicuous material equality. Persaios said that ‘who must recline first or second or sit on the folding chair, all such things they do at the *epaikla*’, i.e. just as they do at the main meal.⁴⁵ The order of reclining no doubt reflected status differences in seniority or (military) rank, while the single folding chair for the fifteenth member of the mess ranked lowest and was perhaps occupied by the youngest member of the mess, or by any member being punished for cowardice.⁴⁶

Tableware, furniture and bedding were surely provided at public expense – a considerable cost in the days when up to 9,000 men dined together and 4,200 couches plus 600 folding stools were needed, not to mention thousands of small tables, mattresses, cushions, drinking cups, and hundreds of mixing bowls. A staff of cooks, pipers and servants also needed to be maintained, perhaps from the surplus of mess contributions rather than public funds.⁴⁷ Cooks and pipers formed hereditary professional classes in Sparta (Hdt. 6.60); the ‘boy’ who poured wine according to Kritias (fr. 33) and the person(s) who distributed food⁴⁸ were presumably helots. It would have introduced an undesirable display of private wealth if the messes had employed personal attendants belonging to private individuals, so these servants were probably publicly owned. In all likelihood each mess not only had its own dedicated serving staff, but also its own cook to prepare food from its own contributions, as opposed to being served by a central kitchen which collected all contributions and distributed cooked food.⁴⁹

Finally, the messes were housed in a public building or buildings. Xenophon’s habit of talking about *suskēnoi* and *syskēnein*, literally ‘tent-sharers’ and ‘tent-sharing’, has encouraged some scholars to infer that the messes met in tents both at home and on campaign. Yet Xenophon clearly used these terms in their broader meaning ‘fellow-diners’ and ‘to dine together’ (esp. *Lak. Pol.* 5.2). At one point, he referred to the king’s mess as ‘the public *skēnē*’ (15.4), but added that it was housed in a ‘building’ (*oikos*), located near an ample water supply (15.6).⁵⁰ The emphasis on its favourable location suggests that it

was separate from the other messes (located along the so-called Hyakinthian Way), but we may infer that the latter were also housed in permanent structures. Later sources accordingly mentioned ‘the door’ through which mess members passed, and one version actually spoke of the door of ‘the building where the messes are’ (scholion on Plato, *Laws* 633a), suggesting a large structure which accommodated numerous groups of diners. A single building large enough for 9,000 diners was beyond the capacity of Greek architecture, but a set of smaller buildings, perhaps stoas divided into dining rooms, would have been feasible.⁵¹ These will have been plain brick structures, not monumental edifices, but nevertheless notable civic amenities, much more similar to normal Greek public dining facilities than to the messes in an army camp.⁵²

Overall, the food, drink and material culture of the messes were not ‘austere’ in the same way as life during military campaigns was austere: there was never any shortage of a considerable variety of foods and always a large quantity of wine; the facilities, furniture and service were very much what one would expect in a domestic rather than military setting. Apart from the possible role of war-like music, the *kōthōn* is the only feature of the messes that might suggest a military model, but this mug can equally be understood as a more broadly utilitarian object. On the other hand, by comparison with the lifestyles of the rich in classical Greece, commensality in the Spartan messes was very restrained, and in some respects it was probably restrained even by the standards of the ‘middle class’, i.e. the lower ranks of the leisure class, especially in its exclusive use of locally produced wine and ceramic tableware which entailed a rejection of two of the most widespread symbols of wealth in the Greek world: imported wines and costly drinking vessels.

9.2.3 The boys’ messes

From a certain age – seven, according to Plutarch (*Lyk.* 16.4) – all Spartan boys were assigned to a ‘troop’ (*ilē*), led by ‘the sharpest of the males’ (Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 2.11). Many aspects of the organization of these ‘troops’ are uncertain,⁵³ but it is clear that they ate their meals together. Our sources stress that the boys received little food and supplemented their diet by stealing supplies, but provide no details of mess contributions or rations.⁵⁴ The fact that a boy’s family was expected to sponsor ‘in proportion to their private means’ the education of one or more other boys, so-called *mothakes*, from families which had lost citizen status, shows that whatever the contributions were, they were provided from private resources, rather than from public funds.⁵⁵ Plutarch commented that the troop leader ‘at home’ used the other boys as servants and sent some of them to fetch (fire)wood (*Lyk.* 17.3), which

implies that there were no helot attendants and that the boys cooked their own dinner, and may suggest that the leader hosted the troop at his parents' house rather than at a public venue, but these details probably reflect a post-classical development (see later). Otherwise, our main sources leave us in the dark about the nature of the boys' messes.

However, a few other relevant texts enable us to develop a rather fuller picture of the boys' commensality as essentially similar to, but more austere than, its adult counterpart. Two authors quoted by Athenaios mention the imposition of fines in the form of foodstuffs at Sparta. Nikokles the Lakonian said that 'having heard everyone out, the ephor either acquitted or found guilty. The victor imposed a light fine of either *kammata* or *kammatides*. *Kammata* are barley-cakes; *kammatides* are what they use to gulp down the cakes' (*FGrH* 587 F 2; Ath. 141a). Persaios' *Lakonian Constitution* added:

At once, he [the victor in the dispute] imposes on the rich a fine of *epaikla* – these are after-dinner snacks – while on the poor he imposes the obligation to bring a reed mat or mattress or bay leaves, so that they can gulp down the *epaikla* after dinner – these consist of barley flour mixed with oil. The whole thing is organized like a little state. For, in addition, who must recline first or second or sit on the folding stool, all such things they do at the *epaikla*. (*FGrH* 584 F 2; Dioskourides *FGrH* 594 F 3 = Ath. 140ef.)

These texts have generally been interpreted as referring to adult messes, but the context in Athenaios is a discussion of a distinctive feature of boys' messes, and Athenaios earlier (140d) cited the same information from Nikokles (*FGrH* 587 F 1) as evidence for the use of *kammatides* and *kammata* by boys, as opposed to men. Moreover, we are clearly not dealing here with fines imposed upon adults: it is inconceivable that these would be so small, or that they would differentiate between rich and poor, or that they would be determined by the litigants. Since the fines were *epaikla* peculiar to boys' messes, or reeds and mattresses used by boys as bedding (Plut. *Lyk.* 16.7; *Mor.* 237b), they must be penalties imposed by boys on each other, evidently in disputes that occurred among them in their troops.⁵⁶ When Persaios said that 'the whole thing is organized like a little state', he was thus talking about the organization of the boys' troops: 'little' referred to the age of its members as much as the size of the group; 'state' alluded at least as much to their method of dispute settlement as to the hierarchy of their seating arrangements at dinner.

In short, the system as described by Persaios in the early third century BC imposed on boys differential punishments in the form of contributions to their troop's communal dinner, with the richer boys getting their parents to spend on extra barley and oil, and the less rich boys collecting bay leaves. It thus emerges that each troop comprised boys from different economic backgrounds

– which is not unexpected but not otherwise explicitly attested. Moreover, we find that boys, like men, reclined rather than sat at dinner and that they mimicked the adult seating hierarchy,⁵⁷ which may imply that a boys' troop, like a men's mess, consisted of fifteen members. Since the fine of 'a reed mat or mattress' is presumably meant to be a contribution to the mess, like the *kammata* and the bay leaves, it is likely that the boys reclined on this rough bedding, on which they also slept, spread on the ground rather than on couches. Finally, again as in the adult messes, the boys ate not only regulation meals, but also after-dinner *epaikla*, to which the rich contributed more than others. Athenaios' information about these *epaikla* happened to come from sources discussing dispute settlement, but fines were surely not the sole source of *epaikla*, and the *kammata* and bay leaves imposed as standard forms of fine were surely not the only kind of after-dinner food for boys.

The conclusion that the boys' meals had two stages, like the men's, helps explain the custom of stealing additional supplies. Several scholars have noted the parallel between stealing by boys and hunting by men, alluded to by Isokrates when he said that:

every day as soon as they wake up these people send out their children, in the company of whoever they choose, nominally to hunt but in practice to steal from those who live in the countryside (12.211).⁵⁸

Apparently, the Spartans conceived of their sons' expeditions as hunting, and it was only non-Spartans who insisted on calling it thieving. We can press the parallel further and suggest that the boys' 'hunting', just like the men's, produced food specifically for the *epaiklon* rather than for the regulation meal. In both cases, the 'hunt' was a mechanism that allowed the relatively poor to gain status by making a contribution to the mess that relied on their personal qualities and skills rather than on their financial means.

If the Spartans regarded the expeditions of their sons as a form of hunting, we should probably infer that they were not confined to theft of property.

Firewood, 'stolen' by the bigger boys according to Plutarch (*Lyk.* 17.3), could simply be gathered from common land. The 'stolen' fox cub hidden by a boy under his cloak (Plut. *Mor.* 234ab; *Lyk.* 18.1) was surely not bred or raised by farmers, but caught in the wild: fox meat was a seasonal delicacy for hunters.⁵⁹ Some 'theft' was thus a matter of boys foraging in the woods or on common land and bringing back anything they could use. In the same way, boys were supposed to get their reed bedding from the banks of the river Eurotas (Plut. *Lyk.* 16.7). Actual thefts 'from the countryside' must have been from the property of helots; the simplest explanation of Xenophon's claim that Spartan boys steal 'whatever is not forbidden by law' (*Anab.* 4.6.14–15; cf. *Lak.Pol.* 2.8), is that Spartan boys were forbidden to steal anything, except from the property of helots, who were excluded from the protection of normal Spartan law by an annual declaration of a state of war between Spartans and

helots.⁶⁰

A different picture is suggested by the *Instituta Laconica* which suggests that the boys stole only at certain times (Plut. *Mor.* 234a) rather than ‘every day’, and by the claim that boys stole from the men’s messes and from ‘gardens’ (*kēpoi*), which could refer to urban vegetable plots as well as rural orchards (Plut. *Lyk.* 17.3). Perhaps this is merely a philosophical construct to ‘clean up’ Sparta’s image by making theft seem more restricted and ritualistic, but it may very well reflect instead a genuine post-classical institution. After the loss of Messenia, the Spartans probably reached a new accommodation with their remaining helots in Lakonia by creating new ‘ancient lots’ with fixed rents (above, [Chapter 8](#)), and if so they would surely also have put an end to indiscriminate ‘hunting’ raids on Lakonian farms by Spartan boys. Rather than abolish this characteristically Spartan custom altogether, it was turned inwards and aimed at Spartiate messes and gardens, as well as perhaps confined to special occasions.⁶¹

If it is true that the catch from the boys’ ‘hunting’ did not constitute part of their basic diet but provided *epaikla*, and that further *epaikla* were sometimes provided by boys from rich families, the similarity between adult and junior messes was very close, and our sources probably exaggerate in suggesting that Spartan boys would starve if they did not steal food. The boys’ rations were evidently significantly smaller than those of the men, and their foraging and raiding expeditions more frequent than the adults’ hunting. The boys’ custom of reclining on pallets on the ground, rather than on couches, and the lack of servants and cooks in their messes were further touches of relative austerity. Nevertheless, the parallels with the adult messes suggest that both were created at the same time and for the same purpose.

9.2.4 The *kopis*: public and private ritual commensality

While men and boys dined in their messes, women and girls presumably ate at home, but we have no information at all about their dining customs except the implication in Xenophon that they ate more food and drank more wine than women elsewhere in Greece (*Lak. Pol.* 1.3). Men and women may have dined together, however, at a ritual feast called *kopis* at which Spartan public and private hospitality was notably lavish.

Plutarch notes two exceptions to the rule that dining in the messes was compulsory: citizens were excused for hunting expeditions and private sacrifices (*Lyk.* 12.2). The first exemption is confirmed by Xenophon (*Lak. Pol.* 6.4), and the second is implied by Herodotos. He tells us that there were (unspecified) occasions on which the kings could legitimately absent

themselves from the public mess, and that the kings could be legitimately ‘invited to a meal by private individuals’ (6.57.3): a plausible explanation for both scenarios is that kings, like private citizens, were allowed to dine in private if, and only if, the dinner in question was a sacrificial meal, which they attended as host or as guest.⁶²

It was certainly classical Spartan practice to suspend the messes on festival days when private and public feasts were held in a sanctuary instead. A leading fifth-century Spartan statesman, Lichas, made his name with the exceptionally lavish banquets which he provided to foreign visitors at the Gymnopaïdiai festival, and several fragments of fifth-century Attic comedy allude to a *kopis* at which ‘every stranger who visits may enjoy a fine feast’ (Kratinos fr. 175 KA).⁶³ At the Hyakinthia in Amyklai a public feast was held at which ‘foreign visitors’ were welcomed, while many Spartan families offered private feasts as well: ‘any other Spartiate who wishes also holds a *kopis*’ (Polemon fr. 86; Ath. 139a). On the second day of the festival ‘they sacrifice a huge number of animals, and the citizens offer a meal to everyone they know and to their own slaves’ (Polykrates *FGrH* 588 F 1; Ath. 139f). Public and private feasts were also held at other festivals. The food consumed at these events ranged beyond the diet of the messes: goat’s meat, wheaten bread, wild vegetables, lupine, and ‘green cheese, slices of stomach and sausage, and as snacks dried figs, white beans and green beans’.⁶⁴ It is at this type of feast that we can place the performance in the mid-fifth century of a poem by Ion of Chios, which is evidently addressed to a Spartan king but describes a kind of feasting unlike anything we would expect to find in the royal mess, with vessels of silver and gold rather than earthenware, and an atmosphere in which humorous allusions to drinking deeply and having sex were acceptable.⁶⁵ Public festivals thus provided occasions for private feasts, held in the temple precinct and visible to all, at which the hosts offered a wide variety and large quantity of food to anyone they cared to invite, Spartiate or foreigner, helot or king.

The same freedom to display wealth, generosity and personal connections is likely to have existed at the private sacrificial meals which were a valid excuse for absence from the messes. These were evidently not held on public festival days, but simply whenever a household or family had a reason to offer sacrifice anywhere. Women and girls are likely to have shared the food at such private sacrificial meals.

A remarkable feature of sacrificial feasts was that diners reclined on the ground, on pallets of brushwood covered with rugs, rather than on couches – inside tents for the public feasts, but perhaps simply outdoors at the accompanying private entertainments.⁶⁶ A couple of archaic vase paintings show precisely this: diners reclining on the ground, in one case outdoors near what appears to be an altar or temple, in contrast to the great majority of vases, which show diners reclining on couches. We are clearly looking here at

representations of sacrificial feasts, which already in the early sixth century took the same form as their hellenistic successors in this respect. One of the scenes features at least one bearded man, one beardless youth and two female pipers reclining together. The status of the women is not clear, but the image confirms that sacrificial meals were attended by old and young and by both sexes, quite unlike the segregated boys' and men's messes.⁶⁷ Apparently, cultic meals continued in much the same form over many centuries: one arena for conspicuous consumption through feasting thus remained open even when the public messes were created.

The only restriction on such private ritual commensality would have been how often one could find a plausible excuse for a private sacrifice. The validity of one's reasons for absence was monitored by one's mess mates, who would 'rebuke' frequent absentees; anyone who was found not to have had a legitimate excuse could be fined (Plut. *Mor.* 226f; *Lyk.* 12.3). Rich and powerful men might be tempted to test the resolve of their mess mates in this respect, as king Agis II did when he returned victorious from war in 418 and, perhaps piqued by the criticism and hostility he had suffered during the campaign, refused to attend the royal mess because he wanted 'to dine with his wife' (Plut. *Lyk.* 12.3; *Mor.* 226f–227a). In this case, his mess mates, the polemarchs, refused to let him get away with it,⁶⁸ but other men may have been able to indulge in private dining without a valid excuse because no one dared challenge them. A slackening of peer pressure will have been instrumental in giving ever more scope for private commensality from the late fourth century onwards (see later).

9.3 The Origins of the Classical Messes

9.3.1 Archaic precursors: *andreia* and their dining culture

Our only real evidence for archaic forerunners of the messes is Alkman's statement that one must start with a paean 'at feasts and at meetings of *andreia*' (fr. 98). Ephoros and Aristotle both say that *phiditia/philitia* used to be called *andreia*, 'men's clubs', in Sparta, and the term does suggest an institutional association rather than an *ad hoc* group of diners.⁶⁹ A reference to a dinner party with seven couches and seven tables (Alkman fr. 19.1) suggests that an *andreion* was of the same size as a classical mess. But whether in Alkman's day all citizens or only the rich were members of an

andreion, whether such clubs met every day or only occasionally, and whether they already served as (part of) military units, is not clear.

In at least one crucial respect, however, Alkman's *andreia* were unlike the classical messes: their members did not yet all eat the same plain regulation food. The range of dishes mentioned by Alkman cannot in itself be used as evidence for a more varied diet in the archaic *andreion*, since the (usually lost) context may have been commensality at festivals or private sacrifices instead – as in the case of the breast-shaped cakes called *kribanai* which turn out to have been used only as offerings at women's festivals.⁷⁰ But it is significant that the food put on the seven tables of the *andreion* consists of wheaten bread sprinkled with poppy-seeds, linseed and sesame, along with bowls of *khrysokolla*, a mixture of honey and linseed, into which the bread was presumably dipped (fr. 19.2–4). Instead of plain barley cake, the staple food was thus the wheaten bread which was later provided at the messes only as an occasional extra by the rich – indeed, it was a *de luxe* form of this special treat. Even more telling is Alkman's boast that he was a 'omnivore' (*pamphagos*) who loved hot pea-soup, 'for he does not eat [sweet?] confections, but seeks out common food, like the people'.⁷¹ The implication that the common people did not eat the same sort of food as the rich is at odds with the egalitarian principles of the classical messes. The acceptance of gluttony as an amusing quirk rather than a serious vice also clashes with the classical ideal of restraint. Even the menu differed: the typical common dish was not the black blood broth, relatively costly since it required slaughtering a pig, but pea-soup, which even the very poor could afford.

In the late seventh century, dining in *andreia* was thus class-based: either only the rich met (daily?) in such clubs where they enjoyed fine foods, while poorer citizens ate more cheaply at home, or else all citizens did belong to a mess group but some *andreia* consisted mainly of rich men while others consisted largely of less well-off citizens and the latter ate less well in their messes, and perhaps met less frequently.⁷² Either way, we do not yet find the intermingling of rich and poor which was characteristic of the classical messes.

Whether archaic 'men's clubs' played a role as military units is uncertain. It has been assumed that they did, on the grounds that this was the norm in early Greece, as supposedly reflected in Homer, but it is not at all clear that there was much overlap between war bands and feasting groups, either in the epics or in archaic Greece.⁷³ On the other hand, in a city as heavily engaged in warfare as archaic Sparta was, it would not be surprising if institutional associations of men had a military function. *Andreia* of fifteen men may have been combined into military units, just as classical mess groups were.

If archaic *andreia* were not part of military units, we can say nothing further about their organization, but if they were, they must have been recruited on a different basis from classical messes. The Spartan army of the late seventh

century almost certainly consisted, not of five or six regiments recruited across the boundaries of kinship and locality, but of three regiments corresponding to one Dorian tribe each, probably subdivided into phratries, and thus organized on principles of (fictive) kinship, which would also have been the basis of recruitment to the *andreia*.⁷⁴ Moreover, the social inequality evident in the diet of the archaic *andreia* was probably reflected on the battlefield as well. Whereas in the fifth-century all Spartan citizens fought as hoplites, Tyrtaios envisaged light infantry armed with missiles mingling in action with hoplites, and he addressed his exhortations to these light-armed as well as to the heavy-armed, which strongly suggests that the light infantry included citizens. At least one scene of combat in Spartan art, c.550, shows an archer and a slinger or stone thrower in action alongside hoplites, and until 500 BC we also find archers, represented kneeling in the combat pose familiar from archaic Greek art, among the lead figurines dedicated to Artemis Orthia, most probably by Spartan citizens.⁷⁵ If *andreia* were an elite institution, one might imagine each *andreion* as the heavy-armed core of a military unit which otherwise consisted of poorer and less well-armed citizens recruited on an *ad hoc*, personal basis. Alternatively, if all citizens were already members of dining groups, richer and poorer *andreia* might have combined to form units with a mixture of heavy- and light-armed soldiers.

As for the ethics of commensality in archaic *andreia*, Alkman's rejection of the fancy food of the rich was presented as the personal preference of an 'omnivore', not yet as a matter of public policy, but evidently in the expectation that such modest tastes would already meet with approval. Alkman, unlike some other archaic poets, is not later cited as evidence for drinking customs, and is only once cited as mentioning kinds of wine: a series of local Spartan vintages, not imports (fr. 92 cd). Perhaps it is not a coincidence that the *kōthōn*-mug first appeared in the late seventh century and that Alkman's contemporary king Leotykhidas I is the first Spartan to be credited with an aphorism about not drinking too much, although little weight can be placed on such late anecdotal evidence. If these are early indications of restraint in drinking, they are not peculiarly Spartan: a concern to rein in drunken violence is also attested elsewhere in Greece in the years around 600 BC.⁷⁶

Lakonian art of the sixth century suggests a drinking culture no different from the rest of Greece. Some of the iconography clearly refers to festivals and sacrifices rather than to daily practice, and we can never be sure that a scene specifically depicts commensality in the *andreion*, so these images have their limitations as evidence. Yet at the same time they have enough distinctive 'Lakonian' features to show that they are not simply generic 'Greek' images without reference to local Spartan customs.⁷⁷ It is therefore significant that in archaic Lakonian art we find no sign of the *kōthōn* in symposium scenes, and no sign of the classical culture of restraint in drinking: the representations

include large mixing bowls and large drinking horns, shorthand for heavy drinking, and very frequently komasts, intoxicated dancers, many depicted as fat or wearing comically padded tunics.⁷⁸ Even if these images represented special ritual occasions rather than everyday commensality, they imply less strict attitudes than in classical Sparta where, as we have seen, drunken *kōmos* processions were banned even at festivals. When the iconographic evidence of vase painting peters out after 525 BC, komasts continue to be represented among the lead figurines dedicated to Artemis Orthia. Satyrs, the embodiment of drunken disinhibition, actually became more common in Lakonian art after 530 and more recognizably of the type associated with Dionysos and drunkenness. Both komasts and satyrs disappeared only around 500 BC.⁷⁹

A parallel development occurred in the representation of musical entertainment. Male and female lyre-players and pipers are mentioned by Alkman and shown in archaic vase painting in connection with drinking and dancing. Indeed, tradition had it that in the seventh century Spartans had accorded great honour to famous musicians and singers from abroad. Pipers and lyre-players of both sexes were accordingly also among the lead figurines, until around 500 BC, when they disappeared along with komasts.⁸⁰ So far as we can tell, therefore, Spartan drinking culture followed normal Greek patterns until the very end of the archaic period.

9.3.2 The date of the ‘Lykourgan’ reform

Despite our limited knowledge of the archaic precursor of the classical messes, we can pinpoint some key changes in the organization of public dining which must have taken place between the time of Alkman and Tyrtaios and the early fifth century, and we can try to date these more precisely. The effacing of Alkman’s distinction between the dining habits of ‘the people’ and of the elite in favour of a uniform diet entailed at least three changes. First, sumptuary restrictions were imposed on the dining customs of the *andreia* of the rich. Second, new economic demands, in the form of mess contributions which constituted a property qualification for citizenship, were imposed on less well-off citizens who previously had either not engaged in public dining at all or else had done so less frequently and lavishly. Third, to achieve the intermingling of rich and relatively poor at public meals, it was necessary to break up the messes of the rich and either assign the ‘poor’ to messes for the first time or reassign them from ‘poor’ messes to new dining groups with an economically mixed membership. It is likely that, fourthly, the standardization of public dining also required the provision at public expense of new or refurbished dining facilities. To this we must add at least two military changes with implications for the messes. One was the introduction of a requirement for all citizens to serve as hoplites rather than as light-armed. The other was

the replacement of a kinship-based army by a force consisting of units recruited across kinship and local boundaries, which entailed either the incorporation of the messes into the army for the first time or else a reform of the principles of recruitment to the messes.

Some recent scholarship has been content to speak vaguely of the classical messes as the product of gradual development,⁸¹ and no doubt the customs of Spartan commensality did develop in the course of the archaic period. Yet none of the six specific changes listed above could have occurred gradually or spontaneously: they required co-ordinated reforms. Moreover, they were closely related and are therefore likely to have been introduced simultaneously, as a single package. The breaking down of class barriers by assigning men of different economic status to the same messes, for example, surely coincided with the application of the principle that messes should recruit across kinship boundaries, while the imposition of a property threshold for membership in the messes will have gone hand-in-hand with the imposition of an obligation on all citizens to serve in the army as hoplites. Public commensality in Sparta must thus at some point have been radically reorganized, in a programme of reform that came to be attributed to the legendary lawgiver Lykourgos.

The candidates for the historical date and purpose of this reform are the same as for the creation of the culture of austerity at large (above, [Chapter 8](#)): during or after the Second Messenian War, in the mid-sixth century, or c.500 BC. A good deal of evidence, some of it rarely if ever considered in this context, does point to the creation of the common messes shortly before 500 BC. For a start, it is at this point that we have our first evidence for the emergence of a distinctive Spartan drinking culture not only in the disappearance of musicians and dancers from the figurines dedicated to Artemis, but also in the moralizing story that king Kleomenes I (c.520–491) was driven ‘mad’ by excessive drinking. The first symptom was that he randomly hit other Spartans in the face with his staff: this was exactly what Alkandros once did to Lykourgos according to the foundation legend of the messes. When put in restraints, Kleomenes resorted to self-mutilation and suicide, which other Greeks saw as divine punishment for various offences, but which the Spartans tellingly blamed instead on heavy drinking. Whatever the fate of the historical Kleomenes, his story became a paradigm of precisely the kind of behaviour that the classical messes tried to prevent.⁸²

The earliest anecdotal expressions of Spartan contempt for musicians were also attributed to Kleomenes and his co-ruler Demaratos. The latter supposedly said of a lyre-player: ‘He is not bad at making pointless noise’, while Kleomenes dismissed lyre-players as ranking no more highly than cooks.⁸³ That lyre-players were singled out for contempt fits with Plutarch’s characterization of Spartans as interested only in the martial music of pipes. A downgrading of the status of music and musicians can be plausibly linked to

the reduced role of music in classical messes, and to the position of pipers as staff in public employment, rather than as competitively sought-after entertainers. We cannot rely on such late anecdotes to be accurately attributed, of course, but these particular *bons mots* match the material record so well that their attribution was probably not random. The imposition of sumptuary restraints on public dining is thus best dated to the reign of Kleomenes I. The king's later reputation suggests that he himself was a target of the reform rather than a driving force behind it.

A similar date for the counterpart of these sumptuary restraints, the imposition of a property threshold for membership in the messes, is suggested by calculation of population figures and rates of decline. The introduction of mess contributions as a requirement for citizenship must almost immediately have started the trend of rapidly declining citizen manpower due to the concentration of landed property (above, [Chapter 8](#)). At the 1.5 per cent p.a. rate of decline attested after Leuktra, it would have taken barely eight years for the original number of 9,000 to fall to 8,000. Yet we know that in 515–510 BC declining citizen numbers were not yet regarded as a problem, because that period saw two attempts to settle a large number of Spartiates abroad, on conquered land in Libya and Sicily.⁸⁴ It follows that the property threshold of the classical mess system cannot have been imposed long before this date.

Conversely, one can extrapolate from attested rates of decline of Spartan manpower how long it would have taken the original number of 9,000 mess members to fall to later levels. Given that under the classical system the messes were part of the army, Spartans must always have had a clear idea of how many adult male citizens there were, at least on paper: it was a simple matter of multiplying the number of military units by the number of messes per unit and by the ideal number of fifteen men per mess. The number of citizens attributed to 'Lykourgos' will thus not have been plucked out of the air, but corresponded to the actual number included when the military role of the messes was established or reformed.

If there were still 9,000 or 8,000 Spartiates in 480, as Herodotos claimed, the messes could have been established only a few years earlier. However, Herodotos was probably wrong to believe that the original number of Spartiates still existed in 480. A much lower number may be inferred from the size of the force of 5,000 men mobilized to fight at Plataia in 479. It is usually assumed that this represents either a mobilization of two-thirds of units, as attested later, or a levy of twenty- to thirty-nine-year-olds only, which is what Herodotos himself may have imagined, since he called this force 'the young men' (*neotēs*).⁸⁵ But several indications suggest that the 5,000 constituted a full levy of Spartiates, implying an already steep drop in numbers from the original level.

First, in 480 BC a full levy was planned by the Spartans and other Peloponnesians, and expected by their Athenian allies, although it did not

materialize (Hdt. 7.206; 8.40); such full Spartan levies are attested at Mantinea in 418, Nemea in 395, and in the aftermath of Leuktra. Surely nothing less would have been deemed sufficient in the face of the Persian threat of 479. Second, the 5,000 *perioikoi* who accompanied the 5,000 Spartiates were described as ‘picked men’ (*logades*, Hdt. 9.11); by implication, the Spartiate force was *not* ‘picked’ but a general levy. Third, the mobilization of 35,000 helots (9.10, 27) has a parallel only in the general levy of Spartans ‘and the helots’ in 418 (Thuc. 5.57.1, 64.2), and their sheer number is hard to reconcile with anything less than a full mobilization because it implies a total helot population so large that it could barely be sustained by the territory.⁸⁶ It is thus likely that the Spartans did send out a general levy in 479, but did not advertise it as such to their allies in order to disguise the already sharp decline in citizen numbers which it revealed: hence the secrecy of the mobilization and the army’s departure during the night (Hdt. 9.10–11).⁸⁷

If this general levy of Spartiates included the twenty- to fifty-five-year-olds, as at Mantinea and Leuktra, the force of 5,000 would represent a total adult male population of 5,880, which corresponds quite well to the number of 5,550 which one can extrapolate for the year 479 BC on the assumption that manpower declined at a rate of 1.5 per cent p.a. both before and after Leuktra.⁸⁸ Extrapolating further back at the same rate of decline, it would have taken c.32 years for the number of citizens to fall from 9,000 to 5,550, implying a date of 511 BC for the creation of the messes. Our information is of course not precise enough to insist on the accuracy of any of the above figures, but it does suggest that the establishment of public messes with 9,000 members could not have happened much earlier than the late sixth century.

In this light, the colonizing ventures of 515–510 BC, led by king Kleomenes’ half-brother Dorieus, may well have been closely related to the reform of the messes. They were perhaps a final attempt to reduce inequality in Sparta by the traditional means of conquest, in which case their disastrous failure may have been a catalyst for the attempt to find a new solution in the creation of public messes. Alternatively, the expeditions may have been an integral part of the reform which created the messes, with Dorieus taking abroad all citizens too poor to qualify for membership among the 9,000. Short of redistributing land, this would have been the only way to ensure that at the outset all Spartiates were ‘Equals’, without the underclass of ‘Inferiors’ which inevitably began to develop soon after the reform. In support of this second scenario one may note that it could have provided the template for the legend of Sparta’s colonization of Thera, led by Theras, regent for Eurysthenes and Prokles, who could not tolerate subordinate status when his wards came of age (Hdt. 4.147.2–3), just as Dorieus could not bear subordination to his brother Kleomenes (5.42); his followers were a large group of people who had been given citizenship but now seemed to pose a threat (4.145.5–146.2).⁸⁹

Moreover, sending out ‘Inferiors’ as colonists later appears to have been Sparta’s way of reducing the size of this disenfranchised class – at least twice, in 426 and 398 BC.⁹⁰

Along with the introduction of a property threshold and the imposition of sumptuary restraint, the public provision of new facilities for the messes can be dated near 500 BC. It has been noted with some puzzlement that Sparta had a tradition of producing very large and ornate bronze kraters, but that the ceramic equivalents had been small mixing bowls until ‘the production of large kraters of excellent quality around 500’ (Stibbe 1989, 40–1, 44). The need to provide a large black-glaze ceramic mixing bowl for each of the 600 reformed messes seems a plausible explanation for the sudden appearance of such vessels. The last significant redesign of the *kōthōn*-mug also occurred c.500, after which the type changed only marginally further in the fifth and fourth centuries (Stibbe 1994, 43–7), perhaps reflecting the start of its production at public demand. As for the buildings which housed the messes, these were located near the ‘tomb of Teisamenos’, the sanctuary where the bones of this legendary hero were worshipped after they had been taken from Helike in Akhaia (Paus. 7.1.8). The cult of Teisamenos went one step beyond that of the bones of his father, Orestes, taken from Tegea, c.560, and reinforced Sparta’s claim to hegemony, as successors to Agamemnon. Spartan intervention in Helike is not otherwise attested but could hardly have taken place before the late sixth century. If the association of the messes with this cult advertising Spartan supremacy was deliberate, as seems likely, the mess buildings too would date to this period.⁹¹

Finally, the imposition on citizens of the obligation to serve exclusively as hoplites, rather than light-armed, may be reflected in the disappearance of archer figurines among dedications after 500 BC. On the traditional view that exclusive hoplite armies fighting in close phalanx formation emerged no later than 650 BC, this seems impossibly late, but it has been argued that the development of the closed phalanx was much more gradual, and that intermingling of light- and heavy-armed remained the norm in the sixth century.⁹² If so, developments in Sparta would have been in line with those elsewhere in Greece, and the all-hoplite citizen army may have been made possible in Sparta by the establishment of a new relatively high property threshold for citizenship at the end of the sixth century.

Four of the six key changes that created the classical messes can thus be independently dated to c.515–500 BC. No independent dating is possible for the remaining two changes, the reallocation of all citizens to mess groups and the abandonment of the archaic kinship-based organization of the army (and messes), or for the institution of the boys’ messes, but every one of these elements seems inseparable from the others and there is nothing to preclude a similar date. We may reasonably conclude that a comprehensive and radical reform of the messes took place at this time, during the reign of Kleomenes I

and Demaratos. Those who proposed it – conceivably Demaratos or else the ephors – evidently presented the reform as a ‘return’ to an ancient institution which had been abandoned in the course of the archaic period, and attributed the original common messes to the legendary lawgiver Lykourgos, along with the rest of the culture of austerity.

9.4 Conclusion: Militarism, Egalitarianism and the Common Messes

The classical system of communal dining was introduced c.515–500 BC in a programme of reform which assigned 9,000 citizens to mess-groups of fifteen members of different ages, families and economic statuses. Each mess formed part of a ‘sworn band’, the basic unit of the Spartan army, initially alongside other messes, later as the Spartiate core of a unit which otherwise consisted of *perioikoi*. Mess meals were cooked and served by helots and other staff, and highly nutritious, but ‘austere’ insofar as the dishes were simple, the wine locally-produced rather than imported, the tableware and furniture plain rather than ostentatious. At the same time, boys were also organized in messes of fifteen members of mixed backgrounds; they lived on a much sparser diet and did without furniture, reclining on the ground on reed mattresses. Men’s and boys’ regulation meals, provided by compulsory monthly contributions from their own resources, were supplemented by ‘after-dinner dishes’ (*epaikla*), donated either by the richer members or by successful hunters. Among boys, ‘hunting’ took the form of foraging expeditions at the expense of nearby helot farms – at least until the loss of Messenia inspired a change in the treatment of Lakonian helots. The introduction of this system of public dining severely reduced scope for private commensality but did not abolish it: women and girls were not affected, while public festivals and private sacrifices continued to be occasions on which men were free to offer lavish hospitality to whomever they chose.

The integration of adult mess groups into the army, the relative simplicity of their diet, and the vital role of hunting and foraging in supplying men and boys with food at first sight may seem to suggest a military rationale for the reform. But although the messes no doubt made a contribution to the efficiency of the Spartan army, this must have been a secondary benefit rather than the primary purpose of reform.⁹³ First, the size of the mess group was not tailored to military needs: ‘sworn band’ and mess did not coincide, but the messes were the size of normal dining groups and several were needed to form a viable military unit. Second, commensality in the adult messes was not geared towards military conditions: men met in civic buildings, not tents,

reclined on covered couches, not on the ground, and ate and drank as much as they liked, not field rations. The boys' messes approximated the conditions of war more closely, but boys of course did not serve in the army. Third, the timing of the reform makes it hard to connect with military needs: Spartan hegemony had been unchallenged for more than a generation by 515–500 BC and Spartans were less actively engaged in warfare than they had been for two centuries, confining themselves to leading coalition forces which intervened in cities torn by civil conflict. Finally, the imposition of large mess contributions from private resources as a condition for citizenship predictably set in motion a steady decline in the number of citizen soldiers, which could have been avoided by public funding of the messes on the Cretan model: evidently, considerations other than the efficiency of the army were uppermost in the minds of the reformers.⁹⁴

A different account of the function of the messes was offered by Xenophon, who generally tried to rationalize Spartan customs as geared towards warfare but conceded that the central principle of public commensality was 'to contribute equal shares and to live in a similar manner' (*Lak. Pol.* 7.3). Aristotle also thought that the relative austerity of the messes was designed, not to ensure physical fitness and military excellence, but to ensure that 'rich man and poor man are not distinguished in any way' (*Pol.* 1294b25–9). Sumptuary restrictions on food and drink, and the public provision of venues, furniture and tableware for the messes, closed down a crucial arena for display of wealth and thus contributed to the general culture of austerity, which aimed to reduce social tensions by removing major incentives to accumulate property and limiting opportunities for conspicuous consumption. At the same time, the requirement to contribute food and wine produced on one's own land confined membership to owners of substantial estates, so that equality in the messes extended only to the leisured classes and the standard of living remained accordingly quite high. The mingling of rich and 'poor' in the same messes helped to efface social distinctions still further by creating close personal ties across class and community, as advertised by the new name *philitia*, 'groups of friends', if that was indeed what they were called. The custom of following regulation dinners with *epaikla* gave the elite some carefully delimited scope to show off their wealth in a way that would benefit and oblige, rather than alienate, their fellow-citizens, while the less rich had an opportunity to compete for status by a display of their hunting skills.

The greater austerity of the boys' messes can be accounted for on similar lines. Xenophon (*Lak. Pol.* 2.5–7) and Plutarch (*Lyk.* 17.3–5; *Mor.* 237ef) argued, with different emphases, that a restricted diet made boys grow taller and more handsome, and that 'hunting' for supplies prepared them for military life. The first point is feeble: a concern for the boys' health and looks might explain a policy of not over-feeding, but not a policy of deliberate under-feeding, as Xenophon was well aware, since he argued that under-

feeding made women and their offspring weak (*Lak. Pol.* 1.3). The second point is more plausible, but it remains puzzling that this form of preparation for war applied only to boys too young to serve in the army. Aristotle, by contrast, explained the customs of the boys' messes in terms of egalitarian principles: 'the sons of rich men and poor men are raised in the same way, and they are educated in such a manner as even the sons of poor men can manage' (*Pol.* 1294b22–4).⁹⁵ On this view, the greater austerity of the boys' messes was due to economic rather than military necessity: it was driven by a need to keep their education cheap and, by implication, more widely affordable than membership of the adult messes.

This egalitarian and economic explanation is vindicated by the custom of private sponsoring of the education of *mothakes*, boys whose fathers had lost citizenship. In sharp contrast to the brutal demotion of adults who could not afford their mess contributions, the Spartans evidently tried hard to give boys a chance to qualify for citizenship when they grew up even if their fathers could no longer afford to pay for their public education. The reason for this was no doubt that many boys whose fathers fell below the property threshold could in due course become full citizens if they inherited property from childless relatives or married into wealth – but only if they had completed the education which was also a requirement for citizenship. To prevent an even steeper decline of manpower than Sparta was already suffering, and to prevent an accumulation of considerable landed property in the hands of men who were not citizens because they had missed out on a public education, it was essential to create the safety-net of *mothax*-status, and imperative to make participation in the boys' messes as cheap as possible. By relying on 'hunting' to make up the shortfall, not only did the Spartans defray part of the cost from helot property, but they offered poorer boys the chance to gain status and make a contribution to the mess despite their fathers' limited resources.

A further and final purpose of the common messes is hinted at by the stories of violence in their foundation legend and in the parallel story of Kleomenes' 'madness'. Tensions caused by economic inequality were exacerbated by the prominence of heavy drinking as a form of conspicuous consumption, which led to drunken aggression by the elite against social inferiors. Sparta's new restrained drinking culture curbed such insulting violence. Restraint was also encouraged by a ban on carrying staffs in assembly (*Plut. Lyk.* 11.4), and perhaps by the use of reed rather than iron strigils (*Plut. Mor.* 239b), to prevent their use as weapons. Since banging on doors was widely associated with drunken processions, the Spartan custom of visitors calling from outside rather than knocking on the door (*ibid.*) may reflect a concern to avoid any suggestion of drunken aggression. A reduction of violence was also among the aims of austerity in the boys' messes. 'The most toil and the greatest lack of leisure' as well as an obligation to be silent, look at the ground and display extreme self-control all round, were imposed on boys after 'the transition

from children to adolescents' when they had 'the biggest ideas', the greatest *hybris*, and 'the strongest appetites for pleasure', all of which needed to be curtailed (Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 3.1–5). 'Hunting' for supplies was surely the major form of 'toil' and thus the boys' relative deprivation of food served not only to foster survival skills and keep their education cheap, but also to foster self-discipline – and to channel arrogance and aggression into raids on helot farms rather than fights with fellow-Spartans.

A trend towards increasingly heavy drinking at private upper-class parties is attested elsewhere in Greece as well, not least in the drinking songs of Anakreon and in the iconography of Attic vase painting which features explicit scenes of drunkenness, including drunken violence and sex, in the late sixth century. Reactions to this general trend seem to have been similar to the Spartan response. Xenophanes, for instance, advocated a drinking culture very much like the one we find in classical Sparta: the amount of wine available was not restricted in any way ('more wine stands at the ready, which promises never to run out'), but drinkers were to avoid becoming aggressive by exercising self-restraint, as measured by their ability to get home unaided ('it is not *hybris* to drink as much as you can take and still get home without a servant, unless you are very elderly', fr. 1.5, 17–18). In this respect, at least, the ethos of the messes was thus not peculiarly Spartan but represented a common response to a widespread social problem in late sixth-century Greece.⁹⁶

Indeed, if the common messes were created at the time and for the purposes suggested above, it is remarkable how much the 'Lykourgan' reform which introduced them had in common with contemporary developments elsewhere in Greece. In Athens, Kleisthenes' reforms of 508 BC sought by different means to achieve very similar ends: greater equality and a reduction of violence among citizens, achieved largely by breaking up traditional ties and 'mixing' people of different local origin and descent in new artificial administrative units, which entailed a reform of military organization but was not primarily designed as such. Both reforms left traditional religious associations and rituals untouched.⁹⁷ The need to maintain control over a large serf population and numerous subject allies no doubt added to the pressure to establish harmonious relations within Sparta, but the fact that Athens went through a similar development at the same time, without facing these external challenges, shows that internal problems, inequality and conflict among citizens, were the driving forces of reform.

The egalitarian messes survived the loss of hegemony and of the Messenian helot labour force by about two generations. It was presumably as a result of ever-increasing economic inequality that from the late fourth century onwards 'austere' common dining became unsustainable and luxurious private dining made a return. It was certainly extreme economic inequality which, another two generations later, drove kings Agis IV and Kleomenes III to try to restore

social and political harmony by not only redistributing land and cancelling debt, but also restoring common messes of sorts – without lasting success.⁹⁸

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NOTES

- 1 References: [Chapter 8](#), nn. 134–5. Major studies of the common messes include Bielschowsky 1869; Nilsson 1912; Nafissi 1991, 173–226; Lavrencic 1993; Link 1998; Ruzé 2005; Rabinowicz 2009.
- 2 Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 3.5; 5.6; *Hell.* 5.4.28; all manuscripts have *philitia* in the latter two passages, as does the oldest manuscript in the first passage, where, however, later manuscripts substituted *phiditia*. Later sources: e.g. Ar. *Pol.* 1272a2–4, b33–4; cf. Plut. *Lyk.* 12.1. *Syskēnia*, used by Xenophon (and its Doric equivalent *syskania*: Hesych. s.v.), was a generic term for commensal groups. Cf. Bielschowsky 1869, 9–13; Lavrencic 1993, 12–16; Ruzé 2005, 288.
- 3 See [Chapter 8](#), Nafissi, this volume; Ruzé 2005, 279. The elite had powerful reasons to resist a ban on private symposia (as demonstrated by Powell 2012, 450–52), but obviously even more reason to resist confiscation of the land and money that made such symposia possible. The story about Alkandros also provides an aetiology for the shrine of Athena Optilletis, but surely derives most of its meaning from the foundation of the messes.
- 4 So Hodgkinson 2000, 44, 70; Marasco 1978.
- 5 Even if we assume for the sake of argument that they did so speculate, they would have been aware that Messenia had twice as much agricultural land as Lakonia and would therefore not have posited an even split of allotments, let alone a two to one split in favour of Lakonia.
- 6 So too e.g. Link 1991, 96–7; Cartledge 1979, 178.
- 7 *Contra* e.g. Figueira 1986, 171; MacDowell 1986, 99.
- 8 Also Plut. *Mor.* 226de; Dion. Hal. 2.23.3–4; Polyain. 2.3.11; Bekker, *Anecd. Gr.* 303.21–2. Discussions: e.g. Bielschowsky 1869, 32–44; Lavrencic 1993, 109–14.
- 9 Thuc. 5.68.3, 64.2–3; Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.12, 17.
- 10 The integration of *perioikoi* is widely accepted, *pace* Lazenby 1985, 14–16.
- 11 Number of Spartiates: See [Chapter 8](#) this volume: twenty-four *lochoi* and ninety-six sworn bands before Leuktra: Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 11.4 (different numbers in *Hellenika* and in Thucydides can be explained by assuming that these texts represent earlier organizational systems: van Wees 2004, 245–8). Only twelve *lochoi* after Leuktra, implying forty-eight sworn

bands: Xen. *Hell.* 7.1.30, 4.20, 5.10.

- 12 Scholion on Plato, *Laws* 633c, gives ten men per mess: perhaps at one stage numbers did fall so low, but more probably this refers to the royal mess on campaign (Xen. *Lak Pol.* 13.1).
- 13 Thuc. 4.38.5 (casualty figures imply 40 per cent proportion of citizens).
- 14 Plutarch's 'or slightly fewer or more' than fifteen presumably refers not to variations in 'paper strength' but variations in actual attendance: 'fewer' due to occasional absentees as well as a decline in numbers; 'more' due to occasional attendance of youths, boys or non-Spartiates.
- 15 The proposed introduction of 'fifteen messes of 200 and 400' under Agis IV would thus have been a radical departure from tradition (Plut. *Agis* 8.4; see Lévy 2003, 70).
- 16 Michell 1964, 236–8; Singor 1999, 72. Two-thirds mobilization: Thuc. 2.10; 2.47.2; 3.15.1.
- 17 Probable reform after 464: e.g. Cartledge 1987, 40–2.
- 18 We cannot generalize from Agesilaos and his son being in separate messes (Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 5.5; *Hell.* 5.4.28), because the royal mess stood outside the system (Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 15.4–5). For the composition of the messes, see Finley 1968.
- 19 For the demographic model used here, see [Chapter 8](#), this volume. The common suggestion that a sworn band contained one man from every year-cohort (e.g. Singor 2002, 266–73; Kennell 2010, 156) is clearly not viable with either one or three mess groups per sworn band.
- 20 Plut. *Lyk.* 12.5–6; scholion on Plato, *Laws* 633a. Link 1998, 96–7, argues that this admission system would lead to status inequality between messes, but this conflicts with his (correct) view that each mess contained both rich and 'poor' members.
- 21 So e.g. Cartledge 1987, 37–43. The status of Amyklai is contested: Kennell 1995, 162–9.
- 22 See van Wees 2006b, 158–61; on Thucydides, see also Hornblower 1991, ad loc.
- 23 Thucydides 5.59.5, 72.4; *Iliad* 12.86–7, 16.155–220, with van Wees 1986, 291–300.
- 24 'Pitana' for Sparta: Eur. *Tro.* 1109–12; anonymous poet in Hesych. s.v. *Pitanatēs stratos*; see van Wees 2006b, 157–8. Poetic account of Plataea: Simonides frs. 10–17 West.

- 25 RO no. 88 [Tod I.204], lines 23–31, interpreted as taken from the oath of the sworn bands by van Wees 2006b; Cartledge 2013 disagrees. Purpose of oath: Singor 1999, 73.
- 26 Hodkinson 2000, 191–2; Figueira 1984, 88–9.
- 27 Fifteen times ten Aiginetan obols amounted to c.35 Attic dr.; in classical Athens, a piglet cost c. 3 dr, a sow 20 dr, a boar 40 dr: van Straaten 1995, 176. Link 1998, 100–1, argues that the cash sum was too small to pay for the meat. Volume and calorific value of grain and wine: Hodkinson 2000, 190–9; his figures for cheese and figs, however, assume an Aiginetan mina of 620 g, which is too heavy: see [Chapter 8](#), this volume, n. 48. That the kings received twice as much as other diners (Hdt. 6.57.1, 3) does not necessarily imply that the others received fixed rations.
- 28 Recipe for broth: implied by Plut. *Mor.* 128c; cf. *Lyk.* 12.6–7; names: Pollux 6.57; Hesych. s.v *bapha*. Mentioned (as a delicacy) by Pherekrates fr.113.3 KA; Aristoph. *Knights* 278 may allude to it. *Contra* Hodkinson 2000, 218; Link 1998, 100–1, Dikaiarkhos treats the broth as part of the regular diet, not as an extra for the *epaiklon* (like the fish and fowl).
- 29 Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 5.3 (also 7.4: messmates value personal effort rather than spending money); Athen. 138c, 140c, 141ce, including Sphairos *FGrH* 585 F 1 and Molpis *FGrH* 590 F 2c.
- 30 See Fisher 1989, 31–2, 39; Link 1998, 94–5; Hodkinson 2000, 217–18, 356–8.
- 31 Ath. 140e; see later on the boys’ messes.
- 32 Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 5.4 (no ‘compulsory drinking’ – emended text), 5.7 (no torches; also Plut. *Lyk.* 12.7; *Mor.* 237a); Kritias frgs. 6, 33 West (Athen. 432d–33b, 463e); Plato, *Laws* 637a (no *kōmos*); [Plato] *Minos* 320a (no drunkenness).
- 33 Plut. *Lyk.* 28.8–9; *Demetrios* 1.5; *Mor.* 239a, 455e; 1067e; see Ducat 1990, 108, 115–16; Fisher 1989, 34; David 1989, 6–7.
- 34 Kritias fr. 6.14–16; Aristotle fr. 611.13; Plut. *Lyk.* 12.6–7, 17.1, 25.3–4 (Sosibios *FGrH* 595 F 19); *Mor.* 631 f. See David 1989; Fisher 1989, esp. 30.
- 35 Paeon: Alkman fr. 98; still practised in fourth century: Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 12.7 (on campaign). Wreaths were not worn at dinner as a sign of grief during the Hyakinthia festival (Polykrates *FGrH* 588 F 1 = Ath. 139d), which implies that normally they were worn.
- 36 Ar. *Pol.* 1339b1–4 (as Ducat 2006, 61–2 notes, Ath. 139e appears to

- contradict this claim); Plut. *Lyk.* 21; *Mor.* 238ab; cf. Philokhoros *FGrH* 328 F 216 (songs in camp, with Bowie 1990). Plut. *Lyk.* 28.5 implies that Spartans sang songs by Alkman, Terpander and Spendon, but this may refer to choral song at festivals. Kleomenes III's banning of music at dinners (Phylarkhos *FGrH* 81 F 44; Plut. *Kleom.* 13.4) need not have been a reversion to old customs.
- 37 Polemon fr. 61 Preller (Ath. 483c): at festivals, etc., but *a fortiori* presumably also in the messes; cf. Eratosthenes fr. 201 B, cited later.
- 38 Description: Heniochos fr. 1 K-A (Ath. 483e). Identification: Stibbe 1994, 43–7.
- 39 As cited by Ath. 482ab and Macrob, *Sat.* 5.21.10. A source which may show golden and silver vessels used in Sparta probably relates to commensality at a festival: see later.
- 40 fr. 88 b 34 D-K = Ath. 483b; Plut. *Lyk.* 9.4–5. Outdoor/military use: Archilokhos fr. 4 West; Aristophanes, *Knights* 599; Xen. *Cyr.* 1.2.8; Theopompos fr. 54 K–A, all cited Ath. 483b–e.
- 41 Cf. Theopompos fr. 54 K–A; Euboulos fr. 56 K–A (Ath. 471d). The contents were further obscured by the ‘colour’ (Plut. *Lyk.* 9.5), i.e. the black glaze. Suggestion that Kritias unduly ‘militarized’: Davidson 1997, 61–8; cf. in general Hodkinson 2006.
- 42 Hypereides, *Against Demosthenes* F (a) Kenyon (*akratokōthōn*); Ath. 483f–484b. Davidson 1997, 63 n. 39, rightly adduces also the ‘Lakonian cup’ of Aristoph. F 225 K-A.
- 43 Plut. *Mor.* 226e; this interpretation removes the supposed inconsistencies between the passage and its context suggested by Hodkinson 2000, 46.
- 44 Cf. Ath. 518c: anecdote about ‘reclining on wood’ in the Spartan messes.
- 45 *FGrH* 584 F 2; Dioskourides *FGrH* 594 F 3 = Ath. 140 f. This refers to the boys’ meals (see later), but the point is surely that the boys observe the same rules as the adult men.
- 46 Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 9.4 suggests that proven cowards were disadvantaged in the mess but not excluded; for full discussion of the status and punishment of ‘tremblers’, see Ducat 2006.
- 47 The public cost of material and staff for the messes appears to have been generally overlooked; even the careful discussion in Hodkinson 2000, 187–90, 196–9, considers only the possibility of personal attendants being fed from mess contributions.
- 48 Polemon fr. 86 Preller (Ath. 139c): an ‘attendant’ (*diakonos*) announced

- the donor's name, while another servant (?) distributed *epaikla*; Molpis *FGrH* 590 F2c (Ath. 141e): cook called out donor's name. The royal mess had a 'carver' (*kreodaitēs*: Plut. *Ages.* 8.1; *Lys.* 23.7; *Mor.* 644b; Pollux 6.34), one of three citizens picked to serve the kings and polemarchs (Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 15.5), but there is no evidence that ordinary messes had carvers.
- 49 Rightly Link 1998, 91–2, *contra* e.g. Lavrencic 1993, 42–3, 94–100. It seems conceivable that each mess, and thus each sworn band, also had its own piper, but this is not clear.
- 50 Lipka 2002, 243–4, shows that this *oikos* can only be understood as the location of the royal mess, not a royal residence. *Contra* e.g. Bielschowsky 1869, 22–3; Lavrencic 1993, 103–8.
- 51 'Doors': also Plut. *Mor.* 236f, 697e; *Lyk.* 12.2. Messes sharing a building: e.g. Ruzé 2005, 285; Lévy 2003, 71–2. Location on Hyakinthian Way: implied by presence of hero shrines for Matton and Keraon worshipped by cooks (Demetrios of Skepsis fr. 10 Gaede = Ath. 173f).
- 52 The dining arrangements at the Karneia as described by Demetrios of Skepsis (fr. 1 Gaede = Ath. 141ef), which involved selected men organized by phratry dining in tent-like structures, were clearly peculiar to this festival and tell us nothing about the daily messes.
- 53 See esp. Ducat 2006; Kennell 1995.
- 54 Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 2.5–9 (corrupt at 2.5; proposed emendations are not satisfactory; see e.g. Ducat 2006, 8–9; Lipka 2002, 123); Arist. fr. 611.13 Rose; Plut. *Lyk.* 17.3–18.1; *Mor.* 237e.
- 55 Phylarkhos *FGrH* 81 F 43 (Ath. 271ef); cf. Ducat 2006, 134–5; Hodkinson 2000, 198.
- 56 Compare Xen. *Cyr.* 1.2.6–7, for dispute settlement among Persian boys. Disciplinary offences were punished differently: Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 2.2, 10–11.
- 57 The habits of reclining and observing hierarchy are also reflected in Plut. *Lyk.* 18.2–3. *Contra* Ducat 2006, 82–3; Fisher 1989, 34, who suggest that boys sat on chairs.
- 58 Ducat 2006, 84, 202–3; Link 2004, 1; Meier 1998, 165–6; David 1993.
- 59 Galen, *De Aliment. Fac.* 3.1.665: 'in our part of the world, too, hunters consume the meat of foxes in the autumn, for the animals get fat on grapes'; cf. Oribasius 2.68.11 (noted by Link 2004, 13 n. 8). But a live fox may have been kept as a pet, as Anton Powell suggests to me.
- 60 Ar. fr. 538 Rose = Plut. *Lyk.* 28.7. Alternatively, a special law may have tabooed the theft of certain items: MacDowell 1986, 59; Hodkinson 2000,

- 61 See Kennell 1995, 122–3, who, however, projects this ritualistic version back into the classical period; cf. Meier 1998, 166; Ducat 2006, 48, 84, 201–7.
- 62 Cf. Hodkinson 2009, 448 (esp. n. 117), 488–9. The kings’ privilege was thus not the right of absence as such (*contra* e.g. Lipka 2002, 240), but the right to receive portions of barley and wine even when they did not attend; see also below for Agis II’s absence in 418.
- 63 Likhas: Xen. *Mem.* 1.2.61; Plut. *Cim.* 10.5. Comedy: also Epilykos fr. 4; Eupolis fr. 147; Philyllios fr. 15 (all at Ath. 138ef, 139d–140a). Suspension of messes is implied by the naming of certain festival days as *apheiditos* (Hesych. s.v.).
- 64 Polemon fr. 86 (also private feasts at the Tithenidia); Molpis *FGrH* 590 F1 (Ath. 140b); cf. public feast at Karneia: Demetrios of Skepsis fr. 1 Gaede (Ath. 141ef). See Bruit 1990.
- 65 Ion fr. 27 West; see West 1985, 73–4, for the Spartan setting and date; Fisher 1989, 34–5, while noting private hospitality at festivals (n. 47), argues for a setting in the royal mess.
- 66 So explicitly Polemon, and implicitly Demetrios, as cited in n. 74, below.
- 67 Stibbe 1972, no. 13 (pl. 6.1), by Naukratis Painter, and no. 191 (pl. 58) by the Arkesilas Painter, both dated to c.565 BC. Pipili 1987, 71–5; 1998, 89–90, posits that reclining on the ground here represents an ‘eastern’ custom.
- 68 The polemarchs surely act as Agis’ mess-mates (on campaign: Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 13.1; probably also at home: Lipka 2002, 210). Agis’ motives: he was probably testing the limits of his personal freedom rather than (re-)asserting a royal privilege (Fisher 1989, 32–3; Carlier 1984, 267). It is unlikely that the polemarchs chose his moment of glory to impose a *new* obligation on him (Hansen 2009, 478–9).
- 69 Ephoros *FGrH* 70 F 149; Ar. *Pol.* 1272a1–4. Alkman fr. 95a refers to ‘common meals’ (*sunaiikliai*) which may refer to *andreia*, but unfortunately we have no context.
- 70 fr. 94, with Sosibios *FGrH* 595 F 6 = Ath. 114f–15a, 646a. Uncertain context: pea-soup (fr. 17); mixed seeds in raisin syrup; boiled wheat; honey (fr. 96); quince (fr. 99); medlar (fr. 100).
- 71 Fr. 17: τὰ κοινὰ ... ὧς δὲ δᾶμος. The text (in Ath. 416 cd) is garbled, but the sense is clear; the key emendation of κοινὰ to κοινὰ seems certain and is universally accepted. For discussions, see esp. Nafissi 1991, 206–14;

- 72 There is some evidence for private dining at home in the line ‘Alkman prepared a meal for himself’ (fr. 95b), but without context its precise significance remains unclear.
- 73 See van Wees 1995, 173–4, 178; Hodkinson 1997a, 90–1; *contra* e.g. Murray 1991, 83–4.
- 74 Tribes: Tyrtaios, fr. 19.8–9; at the time, Spartan choruses were also organized by tribes: Alkman frs. 4.5; 5.2; 11. Subdivision into phratries: suggested by their role in feasting at the Karneia, in emulation of military practice: Demetrios of Skepsis fr. 1 Gaede (Ath. 141ef).
- 75 Tyrtaios, frs. 11.35–8, 23a10–14; cf. van Wees 2000, 149–52; Link 1998, 102; Nafissi 1991, 82–91, pl. 1a. Lead figurines, phases Lead I–IV (650–500 BC): Wace 1929, 262 (clxxxiii.18–20), 269 (cxc.18–19), 274–6 (cxcvii.33). See van Wees 2000, 152–4; 2004, 172–4.
- 76 *Kōthōn*: Stibbe 1994, 43–7. Leotykhidas I: Plut. *Mor.* 224d. For concerns about and measures against drunkenness, c.600 BC, see esp. Fisher 1992, 204–8.
- 77 Festival images: Pipili 1987, 71–5. Large mixing bowls, reclining on the ground, and the presence of flying supernatural beings among the diners, are probable indications of festival settings but are also distinctively Lakonian elements. For distinctiveness of Lakonian iconography in general, see esp. Powell 1998.
- 78 Large mixing bowls: Stibbe 1972, nos. 13 (pl. 6.1), 228 (pl. 80.3), 278 (p. 92.3), 284, 313 (pl. 111.1), 314 (pl. 112.1); cf. Stibbe 1989, 18–19, 21. Drinking horns: Stibbe 1972, nos. 19, 308 (pl. 109.1), 313 (pl. 111.1). Komasts: Pipili 1987 catalogues twenty-nine scenes on vases and one bronze figurine, incl. komasts dancing below a symposion (204a–d), around a lyre player (205a–e), and around a mixing bowl (206a–e); see also her nos. 179, 207–211.
- 79 Satyrs: Pipili 1987, 65–8. Satyrs and komasts: Smith 1998, esp. 79–80; Hodkinson 2000, 218; Ruzé 2005, 282–3. The original publication of the lead figurines (Wace 1929, 262, 269, 274–6) lumped together all male figurines other than warriors or musicians as ‘allied types’ or ‘men on foot’; the komasts, some of whom look like satyrs, are: clxxxiii.25 (Lead I), clxxxix.13–15, cxc.27 (Lead II), cxcvi.21–22, 27, cxcvii.28, 30–2, 35–7 (Lead III–IV, down to 500 BC). There are none in Lead V (c.500–425 BC) or later: Wace 1929, 278.
- 80 See Calame’s [Chapter 7](#) in the present work. Early Spartan respect for poets/musicians: e.g. Aristotle fr. 545 Rose; Terpander T 2, 7–9 Campbell;

Tyrtaios T 1–7 West. Lyre-players: Alkman fr. 101 (the *magadis*, a type of lyre); in art: Stibbe 1972, nos. 71, 238 (pl. 85.1), 247 (pl. 86.3), 272 (pl. 90.2), 293 (pl. 98.1), 312, 315 (pl. 112.4); cf. Pipili 1987, 41–2. Pipers: Alkman frs. 109, 126; in art: Stibbe 1972, nos. 19, 191 (pl. 58), 244 (pl. 85.4), 308 (pl. 109.1), 314 (pl. 112.1). Musicians among lead figurines: Wace 1929, 262, 269, 274–6 (Lead I–IV); none in Lead V–VI; cf. Smith 1998, esp. 79.

- 81 E.g. Meier 1998, 216–17 (gradual replacement in seventh century); Welwei 2004, 82–3; Scott 2010, 176–7 (an early–sixth-century ‘transitional period’ of ‘proto-syssitia’).
- 82 Hdt. 6.75, 84; Griffiths 1989 rightly stresses the folklore and moralizing elements in this story, but identifies different themes. Kleomenes’ life-style was allegedly ‘indulgent’ (*thruptikos*, Plut. *Mor.* 223f), and his daughter Gorgo supposedly had to warn him against encouraging the drinking of wine (*Mor.* 240de; cf. *Mor.* 218d, below, n. 83).
- 83 Demaratos: Plut. *Mor.* 220a; cf. anonymous Spartan at *Mor.* 234a. Kleomenes: *Mor.* 223f–224a; also attributed to Arkhidamos II (469–427 BC) at *Mor.* 218c.
- 84 Hdt. 5.42–6: the expeditions explicitly consisted of Spartiates (5.42.2); the significance of these episodes was pointed out by Figueira 1986, 173–5; Hodkinson 1989, 101.
- 85 Hdt. 9.10. Two-thirds: see above, n. 15. *Neotēs* (Hdt. 9.12.2): Cawkwell 1983, 385; Figueira 1986, 167 (ages twenty to forty-nine; on the demographic scheme adopted here, 5,000 would represent the twenty- to thirty-nine-year-olds of 8,000 men of military age).
- 86 See Hodkinson 2000, 385–8, for calculations which show the difficulty of sustaining such numbers of helots. If 35,000 represents a full mobilization, and we assume (with Hodkinson) that 5,000 were domestic servants, the remaining 30,000 twenty- to fifty-nine-year-old men (c.50 per cent of males of all ages) represent a total agricultural helot population of c.120,000, i.e. a family of four living off half the produce of c.4.5 ha, which is very tight, but just about possible.
- 87 Cf. Cozzoli 1979, 58–73. Secrecy of mobilization: Powell 1989, 180–1.
- 88 For the rate of 1.5 per cent p.a., see [Chapter 8](#), this volume. Starting with 1,100 adult male citizens before Leuktra, projecting back a decline of 1.5 per cent p.a. over the previous 108 years gives a total of 5,550 in 479 BC. If we assume a higher rate of 1.7 per cent p.a. and start with 1,300 citizens before Leuktra the total in 479 BC would have been 8,044, which would vindicate Herodotos if he meant that 8,000 was the total number of

- citizens, but imply that their number had been 9,000 as recently as 486 BC.
- 89 Compare also the legend of the Parthenioi: e.g. Nafissi 1991, 35–51; Malkin 1994, 139–42.
 - 90 So Hodkinson 2009, 434–5. See Thuc. 3.92; Diod. 12.59.3–5 (with Hornblower 1991, 501–8; Herakleia in Trakhis); Xen. *Hell.* 3.2.8 (with Cartledge 1987, 211; Khersonesos).
 - 91 Cults of Orestes and Teisamenos: see Leahy 1955; Boedeker 1998.
 - 92 Van Wees 2004, 166–83; Rawlings 2007, 54–8; Krentz 2007; Wheeler 2007, 192–9. After 500 BC, the few remaining archers among lead figurines no longer adopt the kneeling combat pose, but stand with unstrung bow and may be hunters: Wace 1929, 278 (cxcviii.18–19).
 - 93 So rightly Hodkinson 2006, 142–3, *contra* van Wees 2004, 108. Note Ruzé’s unusual argument (2005, 292–3) that the austerity and discipline of the messes originally applied only in time of war, but in the course of the long wars of the fifth century became the norm.
 - 94 Noted by Aristotle, *Pol.* 1272a13–28; cf. Link 1998, 87–9, esp. n. 24.
 - 95 The Aristotelian *Lak. Pol.*, however, subscribed to the military interpretation (fr. 611.13).
 - 96 See especially Fisher 1989; Rabinowicz 2009 (though the latter’s theory that classical Sparta reverted to a form of public communal dining which had previously been the norm in Greece does not seem to me to be borne out by the evidence).
 - 97 [Ar.] *Ath. Pol.* 21–22.1. Reduction of violence: Forsdyke 2005, 134–42; van Wees 2008, esp. 39. Military dimension to reform: van Wees 2013, 45–61, 66–8, 140–1.
 - 98 Late-fourth-century neglect: Phylarkhos *FGrH* 81 F 44 (Athen. 141f–142b). Restoration: Plut. *Agis* 8.4; *Kleom.* 11.2; 30.1; cf. above, n. 14.

PART III

Political and Military History: The Classical Period and Beyond

CHAPTER 10

Sparta and the Persian Wars, 499–478

Marcello Lupi

Terminology offers a departure point for discussing the relationship between Sparta and the outside world in the years of the Persian wars. If Herodotos is to be believed the Spartans referred to all the “barbarians” (*barbaroi*) as “foreigners” (*xeinoi*). Since Greeks from other *poleis* also counted as *xeinoi*, the absence at Sparta of a linguistic distinction between these other Greeks and “barbarians” suggests a deeply ethnocentric community, for long unable to verbalize a difference that elsewhere was to play a key role in the development of a shared Hellenic identity.¹ This also suggests that Spartan culture played a minor role in the elaboration of an ideology of the war against the Persian invaders as a struggle between Greeks and barbarians. While the construction of this ideology was mainly an Athenian undertaking, we are, here as often, ill-informed about the Spartans’ point of view. Recently it has been even argued (perhaps somewhat dramatically) that “the whole Spartan portrayal of the Persian wars, if it ever existed, is lost” (Marincola (2007) 106–7). What follows, therefore, is a brief historical synthesis freely moving between events, narratives (mostly Herodotos’) and ideological constructs.

But first, let us set the scene.

10.1 Four Kings and a Queen

In the winter of 499/8 BC Aristagoras of Miletos arrived at Sparta on a trireme to ask for support for the revolt of the Ionian cities from Persia. In Herodotos’ narrative (5.49–51), discussions between Aristagoras and the Spartan king Kleomenes took place in front of a map of the earth engraved on a bronze tablet, on which Aristagoras showed the lands and peoples subject to the Persian king (Branscome (2010)). Aristagoras was essentially urging Kleomenes to broaden the horizon of Spartan political action, hitherto mainly confined to the neighboring peoples of the Peloponnese. However, when Kleomenes learned that the journey from the Aegean Sea to Susa (where the Persian king resided) would take three months, he abruptly dismissed his interlocutor and asked him to leave Sparta, because he judged that his people would never accept the proposal of “a journey of three months away from the sea.” As house-guest of Kleomenes, Aristagoras then attempted to change his

host's mind by offering him money. The intervention of Kleomenes' daughter Gorgo (an eight- or nine-year-old child who, as Herodotos relates, induced her father to send away his guest) saved Kleomenes from Aristagoras' attempt at corruption.

The above anecdote reflects two *topoi* associated with Sparta in Herodotos' own day: the corruptibility of its kings and an inward-looking community reluctant to undertake expeditions outside the Peloponnese. The Spartan dislike of overseas campaigns had been revealed fifty years earlier, at the first meeting between Sparta and the great Asiatic empire: in ca. 545, when the Lydian kingdom was attacked by Cyrus (the founder of the Persian kingdom) the Spartans did not intervene, or at least they delayed any intervention, although they had formed an alliance with the Lydian king Croesus Hdt. 1.69–70; 82–3. Later, when the ambassadors of the Greek cities in Asia Minor went to Sparta to ask for support against Cyrus, the Spartans refused to help, although, according to Herodotos, a Spartan delegation visited Cyrus and ordered the new ruler of Asia not to harm any Greek city (1.152; cf. Green (1996) 11: “isolationism, then as now, formed an excellent breeding-ground for megalomania”). The Spartan expeditions against Samos in 525 and, a few years later, to Libya, where Kleomenes' half-brother Dorieus attempted to found a colony, possibly suggest an effort to counter the growing Persian expansionism (Murray (1988) 464). It is likely that the failure of both expeditions explains the prevalence of an isolationist policy in Sparta and the subsequent decision not to intervene on behalf of the Ionian rebels in 499.² Nevertheless the narratives on the delay in helping Kroisos, on the refusal to help the Ionians, and on the various Spartan procrastinations during the Persian expeditions in Greece appear to replicate the same cultural *topos* and to cast doubt on the historicity of at least some of these stories. Indeed we must admit a self-evident fact: our knowledge of Spartan policy during the crucial years of the Persian wars relies largely on Herodotos, on the biased traditions which Herodotos followed, and on the narrative patterns in which he inserted these traditions. Any study on Sparta in the age of the Persian wars is necessarily and primarily an exploration of the Herodotean text.³

It is in Herodotos that we first encounter the Spartan kings who occupy the scene in the first two decades of the fifth century: the Agiads Kleomenes and Leonidas, and the Eurypontids Damaratos and Leotychidas, two in each royal family. In structuring the narrative around them Herodotos inevitably paints an image of Sparta as dominated by its “despotic dyarchs” (Millender (2002a)). One of the “despots” is Kleomenes, on whom Herodotos lingers, beginning with the unusual circumstances of his birth (Hdt. 5.39–41): his father Anaxandridas had first married a daughter of his sister from whom he could not have heirs, so he was consequently forced by ephors and elders to take a second wife. Because he did not want to give up the first one, he found himself in a bigamous marriage which was “completely contrary to Spartiate

practice.” While his first, endogamous, union served a pragmatic need to maintain the family estate within the family,⁴ his second marriage with a woman descending from the ephor Chilon appears dictated by political interests. In any event, the second wife immediately gave birth to Kleomenes while the first, previously sterile, bore in rapid succession Dorieus, Leonidas and Kleombrotos (see [Figure 10.1](#)). Thus, because of “an accident of generative timing” (Cartledge (1987) 110), Kleomenes, as the eldest son, succeeded at the death of his father, around 520 BC.

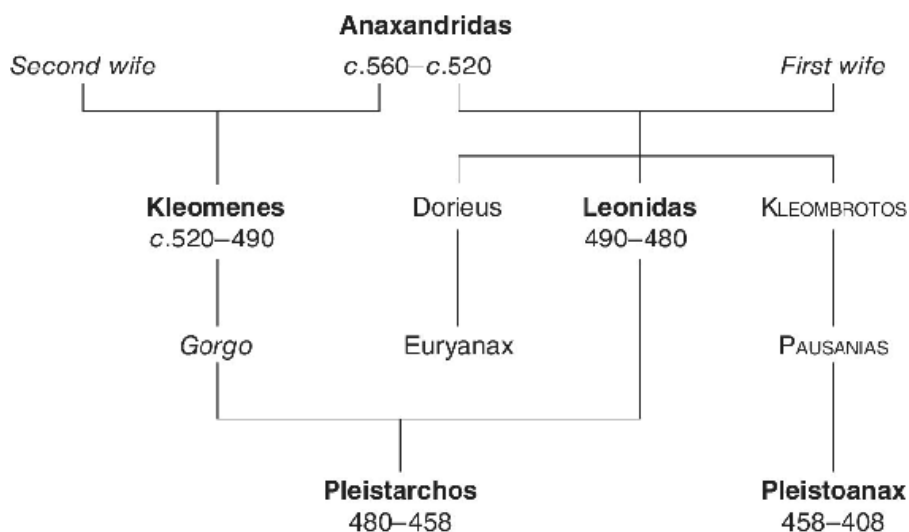


Figure 10.1 Family tree of the Agiad royal house.

Herodotos portrays Kleomenes quite negatively (5.42.1: “about him it is said that he was barely rational and rather insane”), and contrasts him to his brave brother Dorieus – “first amongst all his age-mates.” Excluded from his father’s realm by Kleomenes, Dorieus died in Sicily during a second attempt to found a colony (Malkin (1994) 192–218). The thirty-year reign of Kleomenes is a fundamental moment in the history of late Spartan archaism, marked by the overwhelming victory (probably in 494) over the Argives at the battle of Sepeia (Hdt. 6.76–82).⁵ Although Kleomenes was accused of bribery and of failing to capture the city of Argos itself, undoubtedly his victory still ensured for the Spartans an uncontested hegemony over the Peloponnese.

It is a curious coincidence that a “procreative drama” occurred also in the other royal family. Ariston, the Eurypontid king who was Anaxandridas’ co-ruler in the mid-sixth century, had not been able to produce a descendant from his first two wives. Herodotos’ account of Ariston’s third marriage has folkloristic overtones, and perhaps draws upon certain Spartan marriage customs according to which the same woman could be shared for procreative purposes (Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 1.7–9). According to the Herodotean account, Ariston fell in love with the wife of his best friend and devised a trick so that

he would take her as his bride. However, once married, the woman gave birth to a son before the lapse of nine months, and it was hence suspected that Ariston was not the father. Suspicions, however, did not prevent the son, Damaratos, from succeeding Ariston as his legitimate heir (Hdt. 6.61–4).

The relations between the two kings Kleomenes and Damaratos were marked by several moments of friction, but the final break was brought about by the Aigina affair (Hdt. 6.49–51; 65–7). In 491 the Persian king Darius, about to send an expedition against those cities who had supported the Ionian rebels, wanted to make sure of the intentions of the Greeks. He therefore demanded, according to the Persian expression, “earth and water,” that is a formal act of submission. Asked whether they would take the Persian side (“to medize”)⁶ or not, Athenians and Spartans rejected the request (the Spartans allegedly threw the Persian heralds into a well; cf. Hdt. 7.133), but all the islanders welcomed the proposition. Athens, which was then in conflict with Aigina, invited Sparta to take action against those who were guilty of betraying Greece, and Kleomenes himself landed on the island demanding the surrender of the medizing Aiginetans. However, relying on the support of Damaratos, the Aiginetans refused to hand over hostages. Kleomenes then decided to act against his fellow-king: he allied himself with Leotychidas (a member of a collateral branch of the Eurypontids with a grudge against Damaratos, since the latter had robbed him of his bride) to question the legitimacy of Damaratos’ birth and remove him from the throne. Moreover, Kleomenes bribed the Delphic priestess and received a prophecy stating that Damaratos was not the son of Ariston. As a consequence, Leotychidas was proclaimed king, the Aiginetans conceded the requests of the Spartans, while Damaratos returned to being a private citizen and shortly thereafter took refuge with Darius.

At the end of his *excursus* on the removal of Damaratos, Herodotos claims:

Thus Damaratos came to Asia and – after such adventures, after he had gained much renown among the Lacedaemonians by his actions and his intelligence, and moreover after he had given his country a victory at Olympia in the four-horse chariot – landed there, the only one of all the kings in Sparta who had ever done this.

(Hdt. 6.70.3)

Although the usual translations are misleading and suggest that the “merit” of Damaratos is that he was the only Spartan king to win at Olympia, actually the Herodotean passage indicates that he was the only one to medize (Melluso 2005). Read in this light, Damaratos’ intervention in favor of the Aiginetans who had medized was not the result merely of private hostility towards Kleomenes, but indicates that some at the top of Spartan society were willing to submit to Persia. Regardless of his alleged illegitimacy, Damaratos’ choice to defect to Darius, who gave him “land and cities” (Hdt. 6.70.2; cf. Xen.

Hell. 3.1.6), can most easily be explained if we admit that he had already entertained relations with the Persians. His removal from Sparta suggests a power struggle similar to those that took place in major Greek cities in the years when Persia threatened Greece. On the one hand there was Kleomenes, who, although generally portrayed in a negative way by Herodotos, is instead presented here as one who acts for “the common interest of Greece” (6.61.1). On the other hand, we can presume that the losing side in this struggle attempted to gain the upper hand through the favor of the Persians and was willing to become a tributary to Persia offering earth and water to Xerxes.

Thus, despite the image of an indomitable city rejecting the invaders, an image which Spartan propaganda constructed after the end of the Persian wars, we may reasonably assume that certain Spartan groups who identified with Damaratos’ leadership showed an inclination toward the Persians. They were defeated, but Damaratos does not disappear from history: ten years later, he accompanied Darius’ son Xerxes in his expedition against Greece, hoping that he would once more become king of Sparta, this time with the support of the Persians. Herodotos casts him in the role of the “wise advisor,” determined to establish a communication between Sparta and the Persian world: he attempts to instruct Xerxes on the Spartan value system and, in Herodotos’ perspective, the Persians’ inability to understand this system was a major reason for their defeat (Boedeker 1987). Moreover, while still in Susa he allegedly warned the Spartans of Xerxes’ imminent expedition by a stratagem which only Kleomenes’ daughter, Gorgo, was able to understand (Hdt. 7.239). This largely-positive portrait of Damaratos may suggest that the faction which had supported his policy remained influential in Sparta down to Herodotos’ time, fifty years or more later.

Be that as it may, as soon as their maneuvers against Damaratos became known, Kleomenes and Leotychidas fell into disgrace. While the latter was almost delivered as a hostage to the Aiginetans (Hdt. 6.85) and then disappears from our sources until the spring of 479, Kleomenes was forced to flee to Thessaly. He quickly joined the Arcadians against Sparta, and so intimidated his fellow citizens that they soon recalled him and restored his full powers. Finally, shortly after his return to Sparta, Kleomenes died in circumstances reminiscent of a Victorian novel: he became insane and his relatives put him under guard, until one day he managed to procure a dagger from the servant who guarded him and lacerated himself to death (Hdt. 6.74–5). This rather dramatic tale probably masks the active role Kleomenes’ relatives played in his demise: since the only relatives we can identify are his half-brother Leonidas, who succeeded him on the Agiad throne, and his daughter Gorgo, who married Leonidas, a regicide has been suspected (Harvey (1979)). If so, Kleomenes’ mysterious death puts Leonidas and Gorgo, respectively the hero of Thermopylai and the queen portrayed in Spartan tradition as the perfect personification of female Spartan values

(Paradiso 2003), into a darker perspective.

10.2 Greek Alliance and Spartan Hegemony

By marrying Gorgo, Leonidas strengthened his claim to the throne. A secondary tradition reported by Herodotos (5.41.3), recounted that the last two children of Anaxandridas, Leonidas and Kleombrotos, were twins. By stressing that Leonidas succeeded Kleomenes not only because he was born before Kleombrotos, but because he had married Kleomenes' daughter (7.205.1), the historian implicitly admits that being the son-in-law of the king proved decisive, and this, in turn, makes it likely that Leonidas and Kleombrotos were actually twins. In any case, since Kleomenes' death has been variously dated between 491 and 488,⁷ the date of Leonidas' succession is uncertain. Herodotos' narrative of the Marathon expedition of 490 is of no help here, since both Kleomenes and Leonidas were absent from it.

The role of Sparta in the events of 490 was limited, the Persian expedition being officially aimed against Athens and Eretria, the two cities that had supported the Ionian rebels. Yet, as soon as the Persians disembarked on the Marathon plain, the Athenians sent a request for help to Sparta. Here we encounter one of the Spartans' many "delays": they agreed to help the Athenians, but declared they could not transgress the law requiring them not to leave before the full moon.⁸ The result was that a body of 2,000 Lacedaemonians came to Marathon only after the battle was over. A later Athenian tradition found in Plato (*Laws* 698d–e), attributes the Spartans' delay to a revolt of the Messenians, and it is well known how decisive the subjection of the Messenian helots was for Spartan society; however, the historicity of this uprising remains dubious since there are no parallel sources for it.⁹ Whatever the cause of the Spartan absence from Marathon, it is evident that both this request for help and the embassy to Sparta of the previous year mentioned above, where the Athenians accused the medizing Aiginetans of betraying Greece, imply the Athenians' recognition of Spartan hegemony. Additionally, it has been suggested that a fourth-century BC stone slab from Acharnai (Rhodes and Osborne 88) known as "The Oath of Plataia," which documents an alliance between Athens, Sparta and Plataia against the barbarians, reflects the events of 490 rather than those of 479.¹⁰ If correct, this hypothesis would mean that Sparta and Athens were formally allied against the Persians a full decade before Xerxes' expedition.

The reasons for the leading role of Sparta in the years of the Persian wars lie in the growth of its power in the sixth century and in the authority it had acquired during Kleomenes' reign. Demographics were also important: asked by Xerxes about the approximate Spartan population, Damaratos answered that "the population of the Lacedaemonians and the number of their cities are

great,” declaring the number of soldiers from Sparta to be 8,000 (Hdt. 7.234.2). In early-fifth-century Greece, mostly characterized by the presence of middle- and small-sized *poleis*, a population of this magnitude professionally devoted to soldiering was unparalleled.¹¹ Damaratos’ answers to Xerxes confirm that the legitimacy of the Spartan hegemony was founded upon military strength: “the Lacedaemonians [he explains] are not inferior to any men when fighting one by one, but fighting together they are the best of all men” (Hdt. 7.104.4); consequently, if they are defeated, “there is no other race of men that will take up arms and stand up to you, my king, because you are now up against the noblest kingdom in Greece, and the bravest men” (Hdt. 7.209.4).

Beyond these propagandist claims, Sparta was indeed the only Greek city at the time that had the means to practice a super-regional power through the Peloponnesian league. This raises the question of the relationship between this league and the Greek alliance (the so-called “Hellenic league”) that was founded in 481, when the news reached Greece that Xerxes was organizing a numerically overwhelming army and fleet to lead against Greece. Herodotos does not reveal when and where this alliance was formed. We only learn that, when Xerxes was still at Sardis, “the Greeks who had the best thoughts for Greece” exchanged promises of alliance and decided to put an end to wars between themselves (7.145). The location of their meeting is uncertain, but the Isthmos of Corinth is a probable candidate since the subsequent meetings of the Greek alliance took place there. We should note, however, that a later Spartan tradition, which cannot be confirmed, asserts that the meeting took place in Sparta in a place called Hellenion (Paus. 3.12.6). Herodotos does not identify all those who participated in the beginning of the anti-Persian alliance. Instead he enumerates those Greeks who had conceded earth and water to Xerxes, against whom the allies made this oath: the “collaborationists” would have to pay a tribute to Delphi if the Persians were defeated (7.132). The historian is even more laconic about the legal nature of the alliance, and rather uninterested in its formal aspects. It has been suggested that the Hellenic league was essentially an enlarged Peloponnesian league into which the Athenians were admitted. It has even been argued that the very foundation of a Hellenic league is largely the invention of Herodotos, who – in order to play up Athens’ role – created the illusion of a new alliance different from the pre-existing Spartan one.¹² In fact the Herodotean text is structured around the polarity between Peloponnesians and Athenians, so that the author may have been disinclined to acknowledge that Athens had been, formally speaking, merely one among many of Sparta’s subordinate allies. But we cannot be sure. Moreover, it is not advisable to evaluate one institution (the Greek alliance) in terms of its relationship with another institution (the Peloponnesian league) about which, at least at this period, we are ill-informed.

Certainly, by his narrative Herodotos acknowledges the hegemonic role of Sparta. The theme of Spartan leadership plays a key role in the story of the embassies which the Greeks sent to Argos and Syracuse in search of new allies.¹³ The Argives declared themselves ready to join the Greek coalition, provided that they got at least half of the command and a thirty-year truce with Sparta (so that the generation of the children of the dead in the battle of Sepeia would have time to reach adulthood). Since the Spartans showed themselves willing for their kings to share the command with the sole (and historically obscure) Argive king – *two* kings against *one* – the Argives refused the alliance (7.148–9). Tellingly, the Spartans' right to command was justified both by their overwhelming victory over Argos in the battle of Sepeia and probably even through an allusion to the tradition concerning the earlier Battle of the Champions (ca. 545) which led to the beginning of the Spartan hegemony in the Peloponnese. It was claimed, in fact, that the only survivors of that battle were *two* Argives and *one* Spartan, but because the latter was the only one who remained on the battlefield he proclaimed victory in the name of Sparta (Hdt. 1.80).¹⁴

While the story of the embassy to Argos aims to reaffirm the leadership of Sparta over the Peloponnese, that of the embassy to Gelon, tyrant of Syracuse, has a different function. This episode effectively explains why Spartan hegemony also extended to the command of the fleet, although the Lacedaemonians had a social organization and a cashless economy incompatible with the development of a naval tradition: in fact, Sparta contributed only ten ships to the battle of Cape Artemision and sixteen to that of Salamis (Hdt. 8.1.2; 43.1). According to Herodotos, Gelon was irritated toward the mainland Greeks who had not helped him a few years earlier against the Carthaginians, and yet he was initially willing to enter the alliance provided that he was recognized as its leader. After the Spartans' curt refusal of these terms, Gelon stated that he would settle for the sole command of the fleet. The Athenians replied that they would not accept Gelon's command since they provided the largest naval contingent among the Greeks, but that they were only willing to yield the command of the fleet to the Spartans, if they desired it (7.157–62). An Athenian tradition is detectable here, stressing that the naval hegemony was something which Athens generously conceded to Sparta. Nevertheless, Herodotos later acknowledges that the Athenians' concession of the naval leadership to the Spartans was due to the demand of the Peloponnesians – that is, ultimately, of the Spartans – who would not tolerate a non-Spartan commander. This is the reason that Eurybiadas son of Eurykleidas, “a Spartiate man but not of royal descent,” was given command of the fleet (8.2.1; 42.2). Thus, whereas the Athenian tradition reflects the theme of the double hegemony shared by Athens and Sparta (a theme developed during the decades following the Persian wars), in fact Spartan primacy was indisputable in the first years of the fifth century, even in naval expeditions.

After any attempt to ally with Gelon failed, in two subsequent meetings at the Isthmos the delegates of the Greek cities decided to form a defensive line that would block the advance of the Persians, who had already penetrated into Macedonia, by preventing their access to central Greece. A Greek army of 10,000 hoplites camped near the pass of Tempe, the passageway to Thessaly. Herodotos mentions the Spartan polemarch Euainetos as commander of the Lacedaemonians and Themistokles in charge of the Athenians, but this is probably another attempt to underplay the actual, primary role of Sparta. However, as soon as they realized that it was possible for the enemy to enter Thessaly by another route, the Greeks withdrew leaving the whole region in the hands of Xerxes. Then, in the second meeting at the Isthmos, it was decided to form a new line of defense further south, at the pass of Thermopylai for the army and at the nearby Cape Artemision for the fleet (Hdt. 7.172–5).

10.3 Thermopylai to Plataia

At Thermopylai the command of the Greek army was entrusted to Sparta's king Leonidas, who at the time was about sixty years old. Although he had been Kleomenes' successor already for a decade, nothing is known about his reign before the battle of Thermopylai.¹⁵ Herodotos, who presents him as the most admired of all the Greek commanders, writes that he brought with him a group of three hundred Spartiates chosen exclusively from those who had sons: presumably, therefore, men over thirty years old (7.204–5). It is worth emphasizing that Spartan youth were absent from Thermopylai. It has been argued that the reason behind the exclusion of younger soldiers was Leonidas' understanding that his expedition at Thermopylai might result in their complete annihilation. The death of three hundred fathers of families would not wipe out their respective *oikoi*, and therefore would be preferable to that of young soldiers. However, we should not think that Leonidas' mission was suicidal from the outset.¹⁶ According to Herodotos, the Spartans sent Leonidas' force merely as a vanguard, because the community was engaged in the celebration of the Karneia festival, but they were willing to rush afterwards with all their forces. Since the Karneia was a festival where the unmarried young men played a key role, Herodotos should be believed (cf. Lupi (2000) 61–4). Sending a vanguard was meant to put pressure on those allies who were still uncertain and leaning, perhaps, toward the Persians (7.206). It was meant also to demonstrate, to the Athenians and to the other Greeks, that the Spartans were aware of the responsibility that their leadership placed on them: by sending their king with his bodyguard of three hundred men they signalled their commitment to the war.

Sources differ regarding the composition of the Greek army at Thermopylai:

Herodotos gives a figure of 3,100 Peloponnesians, of whom, besides the 300 Spartiates, the majority were Arcadians; moreover, 700 Thespians and 400 Thebans accompanied Leonidas (7.202). Herodotos, nevertheless, is aware of another tradition according to which 4,000 Peloponnesians fought (7.228.1) or died at Thermopylai (8.25.2). Diodorus, whose version relies on the fourth-century historian Ephoros of Kyme, mentions 4,000 Greeks, of whom 1,000 were Lacedaemonians and specifically 300 were Spartiates (11.4.5–6). It is questionable practice to try to reconcile these numbers at any cost, but it is clear that the Herodotean tradition represents a Sparta-centred perspective, interested in highlighting only the three hundred Spartiates (cf. Vannicelli (2007) 319–21). And, in fact, it by-passes those Lacedaemonians who were not Spartiates, but were either *perioikoi* or helots (the presence of whom Herodotos himself confirms incidentally).¹⁷

After the Persian arrival at Thermopylai and the beginning of the battle, Leonidas' army successfully held back the Persians during the first two days. At the dawn of the third day, once the king was informed that his position had been outflanked via a mountain trail (the so-called Anopaia path), he dismissed most of his army. Leonidas stood to defend the pass only with his three hundred, a Thespian contingent, and the Thebans, who, however, defected to the Persians as soon as they were able to do so (Hdt. 7.210–22). Leonidas' last stand is not easy to explain in exclusively military terms,¹⁸ and it probably was not obligatory even by the standards of the Spartan value system. With the phrase "it is said" (*legetai*), Herodotos introduces what became probably the official explanation of Leonidas' choice, namely that for the Spartans it would be improper "to desert the post which they had originally come to guard." Yet there was an alternative explanation that invoked an oracle: the Spartans consulted the Pythia when they heard that Xerxes was preparing to invade Greece, and the oracle prophesied that Sparta would be destroyed unless one of its kings died.¹⁹ This tradition, which assumes that Leonidas sacrificed himself to save his city by an act of *devotio*,²⁰ was probably generated by the Agiad family, especially given the links of the Agiads to the oracle of Delphi. By supporting this version, the Delphic sanctuary could hope to make amends for holding a medizing attitude during the invasion. In any case, we must stress that such diverse explanations result from later attempts to justify Leonidas' action.

Even the traditions about the death of the three hundred demonstrate significant divergences. In Diodorus' account (11.10), Leonidas leads his men in an improbable night attack on the Persian camp, and they try unsuccessfully to kill Xerxes before being killed themselves at dawn. In Herodotos Leonidas dies in the thick of battle, on its third day. Herodotos describes in epic tones the struggle around Leonidas' body, which the Spartans wrested four times from the Persians; soon afterwards the Spartans were forced to retreat onto a hill, where they were all killed (7.223–5). In this

context, Herodotos declares that the Spartan king proved himself the “best warrior” (*anēr genomenos aristos*). He also mentions that he learned the names not only of those who deserved to be remembered but of all the three hundred, an indication that he had already witnessed the process of their memorialization. Quite probably, this process began as oral and was later codified on a *stele* containing the names of all the dead of Thermopylai (cf. Paradiso (2011)).

After the battle, Xerxes had Leonidas’ corpse decapitated and the head impaled on a stake (Hdt. 7.238). The rest of the story is well known and can be summarized as follows: after the Persians had taken the pass of Thermopylai, the Greek fleet realized that their position at Cape Artemision was untenable and withdrew south to the Saronic Gulf. Xerxes’ army passed through Boiotia and easily took Athens which most of its inhabitants had already evacuated. Yet, quite unexpectedly, in late summer of 480 the Persian fleet was defeated off the island of Salamis. Xerxes decided to return to Persia and entrusted his army to Mardonios, who spent the winter in Thessaly. The following summer, after Mardonios had re-occupied Attica, the Greek alliance went onto the attack and achieved a decisive victory over the Persians in central Greece, near the Boiotian city of Plataia.

But, in the meanwhile, what about Sparta? In the year separating the battle of Thermopylai from that of Plataia, the Spartans do not occupy the centre of the stage. Indeed we observe the re-emergence of an exclusively Peloponnesian vision of Spartan interests, shown by the decision to hold a defensive position to protect the Isthmos of Corinth. To judge by Herodotos’ narrative, this isolationist ideal was quite pervasive: after the fleet abandoned Cape Artemision, the Athenians thought that the whole Peloponnesian army was waiting for the barbarians in Boiotia, but “they heard that the Peloponnesians were building a defensive wall across the Isthmos, since all that mattered to them was the survival of the Peloponnese” (8.40.2). At the head of the army that was camped on the Isthmos was Kleombrotos, Leonidas’ brother, who employed many tens of thousands of men in building the wall (8.71–2). As for the fleet, the Spartans and the other Peloponnesians preferred to fight near the Isthmos (8.49; 56). It was Themistokles who persuaded the Spartan commander Eurybiadas that this was not in their interests because it would lead the Persians to the Peloponnese, where the Isthmos line could easily be turned by a Persian landing in the rear. Themistokles also threatened that the Athenians would depart with their ships and leave the Greek alliance, if they did not fight in the narrows near the island of Salamis (8.57–63).

Nevertheless, the Peloponnesians were “incredulous about Eurybiadas’ foolishness” and insisted that “they should sail for the Peloponnese” (8.74). Even after the victory of Salamis, when Mardonios re-invaded Athens in the summer of 479 and the Spartans did not intervene to help, Herodotos explains their delay as follows:

The Lacedaemonians were on holiday at this time; they were celebrating the Hyakinthia, and nothing was more important to them than catering to the god's requirements. *Moreover*, the defensive wall they were constructing on the Isthmos had reached the stage of having the parapets built on it.

(Hdt. 9.7)

Once again the delay is justified through religious engagement and an exclusive interest in the Peloponnese. Thus the Spartans' decision to run to the help of Athens precisely once the wall was finished is quite unexpected. In the Herodotean text (9.9), this decision takes place at the suggestion of a Tegean named Chileus, who assumes the role, familiar in story-telling, of the "wise advisor." Chileus observed that the wall built on the Isthmos was useless since the Persians would find other access points to invade the Peloponnese. Yet Herodotos implies a more subtle explanation for the Spartans' change of heart. He reports that the command was entrusted to Pausanias, son of Kleombrotos, who exercised regency on behalf of his under-age cousin Pleistarchos, the son of Leonidas. Only at this point we realize that Kleombrotos had died in the meantime, "after bringing back from the Isthmos the army which had built the wall" (9.10). Herodotos suggests that a generational change was responsible for the change of mind. On the one hand, Kleombrotos is the commander who built the wall; with his death the wall, although completed, is revealed in all its futility and it disappears from view. On the other hand, Kleombrotos' son Pausanias is a young man less than thirty years old, entrusted with the leadership of the largest army that ever came out of the Peloponnese. As for the Isthmos, it is no longer a defensive line, but the place where the Greek army gathered to carry out the final attack against Mardonios, who meanwhile had retired to Boiotia thinking that its plains would be best suited to the Persian cavalry.

Pausanias chose as commander in addition his cousin Euryanax, the son of Dorieus, and led a Spartan contingent consisting of 5,000 Spartiates, as many *perioikoi* and, according to Herodotos, 35,000 light-armed helots, in effect seven for every Spartiate (9.28–9). The number of helots is doubtful, and in general the figures related to the light-armed troops appear inflated (it is unlikely that Herodotos was properly informed on the subject).²¹ At any rate, in the context of an army said to consist of approximately 40,000 hoplites (perhaps with some exaggeration), the Lacedaemonian contingent was the most numerous; moreover, the 5,000 Spartiates are said to be Spartan "youth" (*neotēs*), a possible reference to all the year-classes from twenty to forty-five.²²

After penetrating into Boiotia, the Greek army descended towards Plataia, where the decisive engagement took place. The reconstruction of the course of the battle, especially in its topographical aspects, is problematic. Herodotos' narrative, which takes up most of his book nine, is above all a literary

construction and should be evaluated as such (Flower and Marincola (2002) 20–2). The historian reports that, initially, the Greeks deployed near the spring named Gargaphia. Here they faced the Persians for several days until – exposed to constant harassment by the enemy’s cavalry and with the Persians having cut off their supplies – Pausanias and the other Greek commanders decided to retreat to a strip of land called “Island,” which was considered more readily defensible. At nightfall, and after the center of the Greek formation had already completed its retreat, Pausanias ordered the Spartans, who held the right wing, to continue with the withdrawal. At this point, a certain Amompharetos, commander of the battalion (*lochos*) of Pitane, comes onto the scene: while the other officers were ready to obey Pausanias, Amompharetos refused to flee and declared he would never willingly bring shame upon Sparta (9.53.2). Pausanias judged Amompharetos’ attitude intolerable, but tried to persuade him to change his mind. The discussion turned into an open quarrel that lasted until dawn, when Pausanias decided to carry out the retreat. However, once he realized he had been abandoned, Amompharetos did lead his *lochos* towards the rest of the Spartan army and, at the very moment of their rejoining forces, Mardonios’ cavalry attacked the Spartans and the battle began. It was mainly the Spartans and Tegeans who sustained the clash with the best enemy troops. Nevertheless, they eventually won the battle; Herodotos comments, reflecting Greek hoplite ideology, the Persians “fought as naked against hoplites” (9.63.2). The death of Mardonios only served to trigger the collapse of the Persian army who had tried in vain to take refuge behind the wooden wall of the camp, where it was mostly massacred.

Herodotos’ account is constructed from a variety of sources not always consistent with each other (cf. Nyland (1992)). In this respect, the story of Amompharetos and the *lochos* of Pitane (a formation whose very existence Thucydides (1.20.3) famously denies), is particularly illuminating since we can distinguish both pro-Spartan and pro-Athenian sources. On one hand, Herodotos seems to rely on an Athenian tradition which emphasizes the negative behavior of the Spartans at Plataia: their officers quarrel the night before the battle and one of them blatantly disobeys his commander-in-chief. On the other hand, a Spartan source is easily discernible in the subsequent narrative where we learn that Amompharetos, killed during the battle, was judged by the Spartans as one of those who most had distinguished themselves and was buried with honour (9.71.2; 85.1). It seems, therefore, unlikely that Amompharetos disobeyed Pausanias. Rather, it has been reasonably supposed that the *lochos* of Pitane acted as a rearguard and, as such, delayed its withdrawal in order to protect the retreat of the rest of the army.²³ In any case, only ninety-one Spartiates fell in the battle (9.70.5). They were buried in two separate graves, while a third one was reserved for the helots. There has been a lasting scholarly dispute about who occupied the first tomb: the Herodotean manuscripts (9.85.1–2) reserve it for the “priests”

(*irees*), but a long-accepted emendation (now generally rejected) prefers the reading *irenes*, “young men in their twenties.” While the question is still open (cf. Makres (2009)), the emendation would confirm an institutionalized division of the Spartan army and society between younger men under thirty and the older ones, as already observed at Thermopylai.²⁴

On the whole, and notwithstanding the presence of certain passages reflecting an Athenian point of view adverse to the Spartans, Herodotos’ portrait of Pausanias is favorable: he is a reasonable and generous commander, he refuses to mutilate the corpse of Mardonios (9.78–9), he shows compassion to the children of the medizing Thebans (9.88), and he wins “the finest victory of all those we know” (9.64).

10.4 The Use of the Victory

By virtue of a synchronicity attested by Herodotos (9.90.1; 9.100), the day of the battle of Plataia also saw – on the opposite, eastern, side of the Aegean – the battle of Mykale. At the urging of the Samians, the Greek fleet – which after the battle of Salamis had not pursued the Persian ships in flight and was reluctant to sail beyond the island of Delos (Hdt. 8.108; 131–132) – decided to sail to Ionia. To avoid a showdown at sea, the commanders of the Persian fleet had the ships pulled ashore at the promontory of Mykale. The Greeks landed there, destroyed the Persian ships, defeated the troops, and brought about a new revolt of the Ionians. The commander of the fleet was no longer Eurybiadas but king Leotychidas, who apparently had returned to play a significant role in Spartan politics. However, as Herodotos’ reader has already learned (6.72), “even Leotychidas did not reach old age at Sparta.” In a subsequent expedition against the Thessalians to punish them for medizing, Leotychidas received a large sum of money as a bribe to avoid effective measures against them; after being charged for corruption he fled from Sparta and died some years later in Tegea. Tellingly, a shadow of medism weighed on him: his corruption was revealed when he was found seated on a *cheiris* – a distinctively Persian garment resembling a long sleeve – full of silver coins.²⁵

Pausanias the regent did not fare any better: in 478/77 he was commander of the Greek fleet and led a successful naval expedition to Cyprus and Byzantion intended to deprive the Persians of military bases threatening the Aegean area. However, his violent behavior at Byzantion made him unpopular with the new Ionian allies. Moreover, if Thucydides is to be believed (1.94–5; 1.128–34), Pausanias began corresponding with the Persian king Xerxes, and he asked for his daughter’s hand with the intent of ruling over Greece with the king’s support. This story is quite doubtful. Herodotos’ version (5.32), which asserts tentatively that Pausanias was betrothed to the daughter of the satrap

Megabates, is perhaps more plausible but not necessarily more truthful. Anyway, Pausanias was recalled to Sparta and put on trial, but acquitted of medism. He returned to Byzantion as a private citizen, and there he established a personal regime until the Athenians drove him away. Later, about 470, he was summoned again to Sparta: the ephors had collected further proofs of his alleged correspondence with the Persian king and walled him up in the sanctuary of Athena Chalkioikos, where he had taken refuge as a suppliant. Dragged out just before death, his corpse was almost thrown into the Kaiadas crevasse, as was customary with criminals.

Pausanias' alleged medism reflects a Spartan tradition interested in fabricating signs of his guilt.²⁶ According to this tradition, hostility to the regent started soon after the battle of Plataia, when Pausanias had his name inscribed on the tripod dedicated to Apollo at Delphi as a tithe of the spoils. The inscription, mentioned by Thucydides (1.132.2–3), read “Leader of the Greeks, as he destroyed the army of the Persians, Pausanias dedicated this memorial to Phoibos.” The Spartan authorities immediately erased Pausanias' inscription and replaced it with a list of all the cities which had fought to defend Greece, which is still legible today on the Serpent Column that held the tripod (Meiggs and Lewis 27). Their gesture stressed that even a man of royal descent, who had been a victorious general, was required to conform to the principles of Spartan society (Hodkinson (1983)). The downfall of the protagonists of summer 479 BC stemmed from the distrust and envy in “aristocratic and egalitarian communities” against those who took too much power (Nafissi (2004a) 85): accusation of medism was the ideological instrument for getting rid of both Leotychidas and Pausanias.

The decision to recall Pausanias to Sparta signals anew the prevalence of an isolationist policy. However, the process was not immediate. Initially, the Spartans sent a new commander, Dorkis, to head the fleet, but the non-Peloponnesian allies now refused to accept Spartan leadership. Thereafter, the Spartans sent out no further commanders and left the continuation of the war in the hands of the Athenians. Several factors persuaded them to do so. First, they were aware of their lack of naval experience. Second, they were concerned that “those who did go out would become corrupted, as they had seen in the case of Pausanias” (Thuc. 1.95.7). Lastly, there was a need to consolidate the hegemony over the Peloponnese, which for a time seemed to be threatened.²⁷ In Diodorus' narrative (11.50) the choice to renounce the naval leadership took place during a dramatic assembly where it was stated that, for Sparta, the war against the Persians was over. Rather, what was beginning was a different kind of struggle. It was a struggle about how best to exploit the victory over the Persians, and its main theme was the respective merits of Spartans and Athenians in achieving that victory. As we have noted, a detailed reconstruction of the Spartan point of view on this war is at least difficult, but it is still possible to identify some propaganda motifs which

developed either immediately after the victory, before Pausanias' downfall, or in the following decades when the relationship with Athens escalated into open conflict.

During the first years the poet Simonides of Keos played a prominent role in the celebration of the victory and, through it, in the codification of Spartan values. He wrote the famous encomion honouring "those who died at Thermopylai" – where Leonidas is "the king of Sparta who has left behind a great ornament of valour and everlasting fame" (fr. 531 Page) – as well as other epigrams about the dead of Thermopylai.²⁸ He was also the author of an elegy on the victory at Plataia: in the late twentieth century a group of papyrus fragments of this poem was published. Despite several lacunae, the text allows us to glimpse a tradition on the battle of Plataia which was elaborated in the immediate aftermath of that conflict and which partially deviates from the Herodotean narrative. Regardless of where the elegy was performed – and Sparta is a reasonable candidate – it is probable that the poem was commissioned by the Spartans, perhaps by Pausanias himself. The proof is that the perspective is clearly Spartan: in the longest of the surviving fragments we read of the men who go to battle "leaving the Eurotas and the city of Sparta"; of mythical Spartan figures such as the Tyndarids and Menelaos; and we witness the celebration of Pausanias, "the best man, son of the excellent Kleombrotos" (fr. 11 West). Moreover, at the beginning of the same fragment there is an allusion to the Trojan War and to the death of Achilles, which suggests that there was already in place a process of heroization assimilating the Spartan soldiers of the Persian wars to the Greeks who fought at Troy.²⁹

But the crucial issue with which Spartan propaganda had to deal was the interpretation of the events at Thermopylai. The battle essentially amounted to a defeat and, despite Simonides' glorification, Leonidas had delayed the Persian advance only for a few days. The Athenian tradition (as reflected in Herodotos 7.139) acknowledged the great act of Spartan valor but underlined its futility, arguing that the salvation of Greece depended on the Athenian fleet. This under-appreciation explains the Spartan effort to transform a military defeat into a victory of political and moral values.³⁰ The official explanation, according to which the Spartans at Thermopylai could not withdraw because they were not allowed to retreat in the face of the enemy, involves values characteristic of the Spartan military culture from the seventh century.³¹ Yet these values are here transformed into something distinctively Spartan, the benchmark of a renewed identity. This explains Damaratos' famous reference to a "law" (*nomos*) which ordered never to flee battle regardless of how numerous the enemies were, but to stand and perish in formation.³² Hence also the elaboration of the paradigms of the "good" and "bad" Spartan, which the tradition on the Persian wars made possible. If Leonidas was obviously the positive model, the negative was represented by

Aristodamos, a sort of prototype for those Spartans who were disgraced and received the nickname “tremblers” (*tresantes*; cf. Ducat 2005 and 2006b) because they had been unable to confront death in battle. Aristodamos was wrong twice: at Thermopylai, he escaped death; a year later, in search of an honorable death in battle, he died at Plataia, but his behavior was still culpable from a Spartan point of view since he left his place in the battle line (Hdt. 7.229–31; 9.71). Even though Aristodamos died in battle fighting bravely, his was not a “beautiful death” (Loraux 1977). As for Amompharetos at Plataia, his refusal to withdraw should make him a model of heroic behavior, but, if the above-mentioned reconstruction is correct, I suspect that the whole story is mostly ironical. Through him a biased Athenian tradition sought to show the absurdity of not retreating from battle as a fixed value. For this reason it attributed an act of insubordination, refusal to make a strategic withdrawal, to a man whose name means “Blameless”: for him to retreat would have been a dishonor. And yet, notwithstanding, Amompharetos and his battalion eventually did retreat before the enemy!

The other rhetorical strategy used in Spartan propaganda was the interpretation of the battle of Plataia as vengeance for the dead at Thermopylai: Leonidas’ defeat, in other words, was acceptable only if understood in the light of the success of Pausanias (Asheri 1998). Perhaps the connection between the two battles was already present in the Plataia elegy, if the reference to the death of Achilles, who famously died before the decisive victory of his side, was supposed to evoke Leonidas’ death (Pavese (1995) 22–3). The theme of vengeance, in any case, emerges in Herodotos’ text through a Delphic prophecy which forced the Spartans to demand reparation from Xerxes for the death of Leonidas. According to this tradition, Xerxes, about to return to Persia after the defeat of Salamis, pointed to Mardonios as the one who would give satisfaction to the Spartans for the death of their king. Later, when Mardonios dies at Plataia, the historian makes it clear that in this way the oracle was fulfilled (8.114; 9.64.1). Certainly, if Plataia was revenge for Thermopylai in Spartan rhetoric about the Persian wars, eventually Pausanias had to be rehabilitated as the avenger of his uncle Leonidas. And in fact, at some point in the following decades, Pausanias’ corpse was reburied in the place where he had died. Two bronze statues were dedicated at the Temple of Athena Chalkioikos by order of Delphi (Thuc. 1.134.4; Paus. 3.17.7) and probably at the suggestion of his son Pleistoanax who had in the meantime become king. As attested in a problematic passage of the learned travel-writer Pausanias (2nd century AD), the tombs of the two Agiads, the king and the regent, were to be seen side by side:

Opposite the theatre is the tomb of Pausanias, who commanded at Plataia, and a second one, that of Leonidas. Every year they deliver speeches over them and hold a contest in which none may compete except Spartans. The bones of Leonidas were taken by Pausanias from Thermopylai forty [*sic!*]

years afterwards. A *stele* has been set up with the names and patronymics of those who stood firm in the struggle at Thermopylai against the Persians.

(3.14.1)

The introduction of a contest held every year could reflect a much later historical reality (Cartledge and Spawforth (1989) 192–3), but what must be emphasized here is the transfer to Sparta of the alleged remains of Leonidas. Certainly the regent Pausanias could not have brought them back to Sparta forty years after the battle, since he had died many years before. If he ever did so, the text must have read not “forty” but possibly only “four” years afterwards. Alternatively, we could accept “forty,” but concede that Leonidas’ remains were brought back to Sparta by someone else.³³ A lengthy discussion of the question would be out of place here. What is certain is that on the eve of the Peloponnesian War a process of heroic monumentalization of the glorious past of the Persian wars was in place. Near the Chalkioikos sanctuary at Sparta, and not far from the agora, the tombs of Leonidas and Pausanias were visible to the whole community and, close by, was the stele honoring the dead of Thermopylai with their names and fathers’ names.

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FURTHER READING

Useful introductions to the Persian wars are Green (1996), Lazenby (1993) and Cawkwell (2005) 61–125. For a Spartan perspective see Cartledge (2006), mostly on Thermopylai, and Kennell (2009) 54–75. Given the nature of the evidence, commentaries to Herodotos, particularly on books seven and nine, are indispensable. On book seven see P. Vannicelli and A. Corcella, eds (2017) *Erodoto. Le Storie: volume VII. Serse e Leonida*, Milan, and the (forthcoming) commentary by C. Carey in the Cambridge “green and yellow” series; on book nine see Flower and Marincola, eds (2002) and Asheri and Corcella, eds (2006). Among the papers published after the present essay was delivered see at least J. Marincola (2016), “The Historian as Hero: Herodotus and the 300 at Thermopylae”, *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 146: 219–36.

NOTES

- 1 Cf. Moggi (1992) 53. Herodotus mentions this Spartan linguistic usage in two different passages (but the second one could be a scholiast’s gloss): 9.11.2 and 9.55.2.
- 2 On Spartan policy as oscillating between isolationism and imperialism, see Roobaert (1985).
- 3 Herodotean bibliography is huge and fast growing: on narrative patterns, see Immerwahr (1966); about Sparta and its representation in the *Histories* cf. Lévy (1999) and Stadter (2006) 243–7; on the Persian invasions see

- 4 On this practice, cf. Hodkinson (2000) 405–9.
- 5 See Carlier (1977); Cawkwell (1993); Bultrighini (2003).
- 6 On the phenomenon of medism and the significance of the term, cf. Graf (1984) and Tuplin (1997).
- 7 See Figueira (1988); Cawkwell (1993) 511–4.
- 8 Hdt. 6.106; 120. On Spartan religious scruples in warfare, cf. Goodman and Holladay (1986) 152–60; Parker (1989) 155–160; Powell (2009).
- 9 On this point see Hunt (1998) 28–31 and *contra* Luraghi (2008) 173–82.
- 10 Krentz (2007); cf. van Wees (2006), who has identified several Spartan elements in the text of the oath.
- 11 On Spartan population before 480 see Figueira (1986) 167–75.
- 12 Tronson (1991). On the Hellenic league, see Brunt (1953); Kienast (2003); Vannicelli (2008).
- 13 Cf. Wickersham (1994) 1–10, and Baragwanath (2008) 211–20.
- 14 On the Battle of the Champions as narrative blueprint for Spartan behavior during the Persian wars, see Dillery (1996).
- 15 At least, if we disregard a dubious reference to a diplomatic mission sent by the Sicilian Greeks to Leonidas (Just. *Epit.* 19.1.9).
- 16 Although widely shared (see e.g. Cartledge (2006) 129–30), this interpretation raises more problems than it solves; interesting observations on this question in Moggi (2007) 12–27.
- 17 Hdt. 7.229.1; 8.25.1. On the sources for Thermopylai see Hammond (1996) (who is excessively optimistic in thinking that we can grasp what really happened through the surviving sources), and Flower (1998); on Herodotus' characterization of the battle cf. Clarke (2002), Lombardo (2005), Baragwanath (2008) 64–78.
- 18 Cf. Evans (1969); Hope Simpson (1972).
- 19 Hdt. 7.220. On this oracle see Lupi (2014); cf. also Clarke (2002) 69–70 and Powell (2009) 41.
- 20 A similar (and equally suspicious) tradition is that about Sperthias and Bulis, the two Spartans who offered themselves as sacrifice to Xerxes, as atonement for the killing of the Persian heralds thrown into a well. Xerxes spared their lives, but many years later, at the beginning of the

Peloponnesian war, their sons, sent as heralds to Persia, were captured and killed by the Athenians, who threw their bodies into a ravine (Hdt. 7.133–7; cf. Thuc. 2.67).

- 21 Cf. Bettalli (2005) 226–29; for a different, and somewhat eccentric, interpretation, see Hunt (1997), who accepts the Herodotean figures and argues that the helots formed the mass of the Spartan phalanx.
- 22 Hdt. 9.12.2; cf. Cartledge (1987) 21. For Figueira (1986) 167–9, the year classes called up in 479 were from twenty to fifty.
- 23 See Lazenby (1993) 237, Green (1996) 265 and doubts in Tritle (2006) 219.
- 24 On this point and generally on Amompharetos and the *lochos* of Pitane, see now Lupi (2006); on the *eirenes/lirenes* see also Ducat (2006) 94–100; Van Wees, this volume, p. 221.
- 25 The word *cheiris* is absent from the manuscript tradition of Herodotus 6.72.2, but it is a reasonable conjecture accepted in most editions.
- 26 On Pausanias and the tradition on his medism see Lazenby (1975); Bourriot (1982); Evans (1988); Nafissi (2004a) and (2004b).
- 27 Cf. Hdt. 9.35.2, showing that in the seventies and sixties of the fifth century Sparta was involved in a series of battles against Arcadians, Argives and Messenians. The war against the Messenians is evidently the revolt which broke out after the earthquake of the mid 460s.
- 28 See Podlecky (1968) 257–62, and, on the encomion, Steiner (1999). Three epigrams are quoted in Hdt. 7.228, but only the third one is explicitly ascribed to Simonides: cf. Petrovic (2007) 231–49.
- 29 On the Plataea elegy, see the papers collected in Boedeker and Sider, eds, and particularly Aloni (2001), Boedeker (2001a) and (2001b), Shaw (2001); cf. also Kowerski (2005). A useful synthesis is Asheri (2004).
- 30 See Cartledge (2004); Moggi (2007).
- 31 Cf. Tyrtaeus fr. 10–11 West; van Wees (2006) 129.
- 32 Hdt. 7.104.4–5. Forsdyke (2001) 341–54, argues that Demaratus’ eulogy of Spartan courage, although originating in Spartan tradition, reflects an Athenian perspective; see also Millender (2002b).
- 33 See Podlecky (1968) 275; Connor (1979); Asheri (1998) 82; Paradiso (2011) 523–6.

CHAPTER 11

Sparta's Foreign – and Internal – History, 478–403

Anton Powell

11.1 After the Persian Invasion: Sparta's Difficulties as the Greek Superpower

In 478 Sparta's reputation stood enviably high. Even before the Persian invasion reached Thermopylai, Sparta had been trusted and respected as a military leader: sufficiently trusted to be given sole command of the Greek resistance to the invasion. And the actual fighting had crowned Sparta's status. One Spartan king, Leonidas, had proved his devotion to the common cause by fighting and dying, with all his Spartan force, at Thermopylai (480). Another Spartan king, Leotychidas, had commanded at a crushing defeat of Persian naval forces in the eastern Aegean, at Mykale (479). And in the same year a further royal Spartan ruler, Pausanias the regent, had been the general in charge of the decisive victory over Persia's land forces, at Plataia in central Greece. A distant observer might have expected the following decades to see a long, if not serene, domination by Sparta of Greek affairs, in the Peloponnese and far beyond. And yet no such thing occurred. Instead, Sparta would withdraw, under pressure, from the leadership of the continuing anti-Persian alliance of Greeks. She became preoccupied with problems internal not just to the Peloponnese but to her own heartland, to the revered villages on the River Eurotas which *were* Sparta. The consequences of village politics would be felt over most of Greece. Sparta in effect allowed Athens to take her place as leader of anti-Persian campaigning. Athenian power was allowed to grow to the point where Sparta had to contemplate re-engaging, in other grand ventures outside the Peloponnese. But this time she would lead not against Persia but against Athens.

It is both difficult and intriguing to reconstruct Sparta's problems, and Spartan strategic thinking, in the (almost) half-century between the defeat of Persia and the beginning of the great war – the 'Peloponnesian War' – which Sparta began against Athens in 431. Secrecy was part of Sparta's military armoury ([Chapter 1](#)): the Spartan authorities were not normally going to advertise the nature of their own problems, for fear of giving information which enemies might exploit. But some things could not be hidden, things which were visible to other Greeks. And these few things allow us to detect patterns of Spartan

behaviour; here is a society which to a remarkable extent ran according to formulae.

For the half-century which followed the Persian invasion our best source for Sparta is Thucydides, who cast glances back from his main theme, the Peloponnesian War of 431–404. Here is Thucydides' summary of the 'approximately fifty years', as he called them:

... the Athenians established their rule more firmly and advanced to a position of very great power. The Spartans, for their part, realised what was going on but only made brief attempts to prevent it. For most of the period they did nothing; it had been their practice even in earlier times not to take up war in a hurry unless forced to. Now they were also inhibited to a degree by internal wars – until Athens' power was blatantly in the ascendant and encroaching on Sparta's own alliance.

(1.118.2)

Thucydides' report on visible processes – the wars, and periods of peace, involving Sparta – is vital information, to be explored in a moment, with important help from his predecessor the historian Herodotos. On what was invisible, Spartan mentality, we may form an opinion rather different from that of Thucydides, but it is an opinion which derives largely from his own information.

One of Sparta's greatest problems came right at the beginning of the half-century. It could not be hidden, so the Spartans chose to explain it with a mass of colourful detail: the decline and fall of regent Pausanias.¹ After the defeat of the Persian army at Plataia, Pausanias led Greek naval forces eastwards, campaigning (probably in 478) against strategic Persian possessions, Cyprus and Byzantium. The trauma for Greece of the Persian land invasion had been immense. And there was no reason to suppose that the Persians would not try another invasion. This is a point seldom allowed for in modern accounts (Rhodes (2006) 16 is a distinguished exception). Scholars have commonly shared the hindsight of Greeks in later decades: that since the Persians *in the event* did not re-invade, any such prospect must have been negligible at the time. But if we neglect the fear of re-invasion, we risk failing to understand the policies of Sparta, of Athens and of many other states over decades. The Persians had, after all, reacted to their defeat at Marathon, near Athens in 490, by launching the great invasion of 480-79. A possible third invasion – perhaps even larger than before – might seem crucial for restoring Persia's own prestige; for Greeks, it had to be energetically forestalled. As much strategic damage as possible should be done to the Persian empire even after the victories of 479. However, as *stratēgos*, Pausanias proved unacceptable. Thucydides reports his unpopularity among the Greek sailors and soldiers. Violent, aloof, unapproachable, even surrounding himself with a bodyguard in Persian style – these were some of the criticisms made of him. More worrying

for the eastern Greeks was the Spartan advice to the Greeks of Ionia, Persia's former subjects of western Asia Minor with everything to fear from a Persian comeback. Sparta suggested that they emigrate westwards; a clear signal that Sparta did not wish to defend them in their homeland against Persia. Following the complaints against Pausanias, Sparta recalled him for investigation. The Greek naval forces then refused to accept Sparta's replacement, Dorkis, as commander, and chose instead to be led in future by Athens, the greatest single provider of warships.

Sparta did not react violently to this striking rejection, coming so soon after her triumphant leadership against Persia on sea as well as on land. She evidently accepted that the war in the east was necessary; her sending out Dorkis to command shows that. Thucydides reports that the Spartans believed Athens to be well-disposed to themselves and a suitable leader for the naval war. We know that Themistokles, Athens' naval strategist and leader during the Persian invasion, had pleased Sparta by the way he had worked under Spartan leadership in the crisis of 480. Herodotos (8.124) reports that Themistokles was received and fêted at Sparta with extraordinary honours. But part of the attraction for Sparta of allowing Athens to take over the leadership – and the costly fighting – against Persia was connected with altogether darker and more intimate motives.

Sparta was restless under the control of royalty (Powell, 2010). In her propaganda, she claimed that her political constitution had been loyally respected for centuries, and that the dual kingship, the dyarchy, was the oldest of all surviving offices (Thuc.1.18.1, Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 15.1, and above, [Chapter 1](#)). But the very fact that there *was* such Spartan insistence on these and similar claims should make us suspicious. In reality, the rough treatment of Pausanias was entirely in keeping with Spartan treatment of royalty in the fifth and early fourth centuries. Most Spartan royal rulers of that period were either imprisoned, or effectively put to death, or threatened with exile, or actually exiled. And even exile was not secure: three of the dyarchs-in-exile had reason to fear that they would be pursued by Sparta and killed. So recurrent is this violent impatience of Sparta with her kings that we should probably regard hostility to these rich and hereditary officials as a continuing part of the 'Lykourgan' revolution which aimed for a state made up of 'Similar'. From the few decades before the fall of Pausanias, Sparta's best-known king was Leonidas, acclaimed – *after* his death – for courageous leadership at Thermopylai. But the story of Leonidas and his 300 was a distraction, as we have seen ([Chapter 1](#)). It distracted from thoughts of Spartan failure to hold the pass of Thermopylai. It also distracted, perhaps intentionally, from thoughts of what had happened to other Spartan kings of the period. Damaratos had been exiled and pursued, to the point that he fled to the king of Persia (491). His enemy and fellow king Kleomenes had died violently as a prisoner at Sparta (490), after being exiled and recalled. King Leotychidas had

suffered the frightening humiliation of being handed over to the control of Aigina, a state which he had offended in the course of his execution of official Spartan foreign policy. Sparta had second thoughts: Leotychidas was not sent to Aigina. He lived to lead Spartan and allied forces at Mykale against Persia – only to be exiled in permanent disgrace a few years afterwards, as we shall shortly see. There were evidently many powerful Spartans who needed little persuasion to sweep aside royalty. Pausanias would be put to death at Sparta, some little time after his recall from campaigning in the Greek east. The official story told against him was utterly damning, and was no doubt meant to be: he had supposedly plotted with the helots to overthrow the Spartan state, and had also conspired with the king of Persia to bring an end to Greek freedom. Both Spartan citizens and most other Greek states thus had reason, according to the official story, to approve of his being put to death.

Thucydides makes no mention of the fate of Sparta's other royal victor of 479, Leotychidas. Herodotos, however, reports that, sometime after Mykale, this king was in charge of an expedition against the Greek rulers of Thessaly (6.72). These Thessalians had, under extreme pressure, taken the Persian side in 480 and Sparta was evidently seeking now to replace them with a loyalist regime. Leotychidas, however, did not succeed. The story – no doubt officially inspired from Sparta – was that he was caught during the campaign trying to conceal a 'sleeve' – *cheiris* – full of silver. Now a *cheiris* was a distinctively Persian garment. Here, according to the story, was the most perfectly symbolic proof that Leotychidas had accepted a bribe in the Persian interest. The image was unforgettable both because of its moral clarity and its visual force; visibility, whether staged in concrete form or evoked in words, was a Spartan forte. Those who heard the story would think for ever of Leotychidas crouching in his tent, vainly trying to conceal the tainted, alien, object. In connection with the killing of regent Pausanias, Thucydides wrote that the Spartans did not like to take irrevocable action against their own people without unshakeable proof. Tales of extreme wickedness perpetrated with symbolic clarity were the best which could be offered to persuade a Spartan public which could not see for itself what went on in a royal tent during a remote campaign. A Spartan court condemned Leotychidas. His house was destroyed, to signal – once more with an enduring visual effect – that he had no future at Sparta. He went into exile at Tegea, not far from Sparta's northern border.

True or not, these stories about Pausanias and Leotychidas would tend to discourage the Spartan state from taking further part in anti-Persian campaigns. That *both* the victorious Spartan commanders of 479 had supposedly been corrupted by the wealth or grandeur which Persia uniquely could offer suggested that further commanders might go the same way. Thucydides writes to this effect (1.95.7), explaining why Sparta made no great effort to retain command of the anti-Persian war once Pausanias had been

removed from control. Sparta frequently distrusted her own highest officials, once those were away on campaign, out of sight of the domestic institutions, such as the ephors and the court of the *gerousia*, which had the power to control them. This structural fault recalls another statement of Thucydides: that it was Sparta's internal harmony which made it possible for the state to impose its will upon other Greek communities. That statement is made in the same sentence as the claim that the Spartan constitution had survived successfully for more than four hundred years (1.18.1). It was argued above ([Chapter 1](#)) that the latter claim was false, propaganda from Spartan authorities nervously aware of the exact opposite, that their constitution was in fact neither old nor secure. The connected statement, about internal harmony producing external success, may have a similar origin. Recurrent extreme failures of the early fifth century involving their kings – their hereditary generals for life, as Aristotle described them (*Politics* 1285a) – had made the Spartans acutely conscious of how their foreign policy might be crippled by internal dissent. With retrospect, Sparta might see that the Athenian takeover of leadership against Persia, and thus the beginnings of the Athenian empire, had been owed to Sparta's own constitutional *incoherence*.

There were other unpleasant concerns which in the 470s and 460s encouraged Sparta to turn away from the war against Persia. Modern historians, trained to explain the behaviour of states by grand, collective, economic motives, are sometimes reluctant to take seriously explanations involving personal jealousy and enmity. But our best sources for Sparta record that such things mattered. Thucydides reports that regent Pausanias had significant personal enemies (*echthroi*, in Greek: 1.132.1) opposing him at Sparta. Decades later Brasidas, one of the most successful strategists and bravest soldiers that Sparta ever had, found his campaigning inhibited by personal resentment on the part of other Spartans. One reason why he did not receive reinforcements from Sparta in 424/3 was, states Thucydides (4.108.7), that 'leading men of Sparta were jealous of him'. Here indeed was a structural fault of profound importance, if the state's success was to be limited by private rancour.

However, for explaining Sparta's withdrawal from leadership of the anti-Persian alliance in the 470s, perhaps most enlightening is a comparison with Sparta's actions in, and shortly after, 404. In the 470s, as we have seen, Sparta was freshly crowned with success as leader against the Persian invasion. In 404–3 Sparta was similarly triumphant, this time over the Athenian empire. At both periods, intense opposition arose within Sparta to the general who had proved most successful. Lysandros, like the victorious Pausanias three quarters of a century earlier, was accused of plotting to overthrow the Spartan form of government, to put himself in sole charge. Lysandros, we hear from a good, contemporary source, was opposed through jealousy on the part of a Spartan king (Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.29). This emotion, which curbed Brasidas and Lysandros near the end of the fifth century, was surely part of the reason why,

decades earlier, Pausanias was permanently withdrawn from the anti-Persian campaigning which had made his glory.

Spartans chose to call themselves the *Similars*. That almost certainly reflected a fear of dissimilarity, as we have seen ([Chapter 1](#)). And one form of dissimilarity particularly feared was to do with wealth. Spartan life was constructed to mask and to palliate divisions between rich and poor (Hodkinson, 2000). Unlike in most societies, there was to be no competition in the selfish flaunting of wealth. (Rivalry in the exceptionally expensive sport of chariot racing did continue among the richest Spartans, but that was no doubt tolerated as advertising to Greeks generally the virility of Spartan society.) The main permitted sphere of competition was to do with military courage and skill in the community's interest. That competition was exceptionally intense. It is small wonder that all Sparta's most important military victors of the fifth century – Pausanias and Leotychidas against the Persians, Brasidas, Gylippos and Lysandros against the Athenians – were either effectively killed by Spartans (Pausanias) or exiled (Leotychidas, Gylippos; see later below), or recorded as the objects of jealousy (Brasidas, Lysandros). The very military virtues which Sparta required and revered tended to bring their most noted possessors to destruction. But what allowed the jealousy of some to be converted into a decision of the community, to crush, expel or restrict its supreme soldiers, was the fact that military success tended to make such commanders rich, rich enough to threaten the stability of the *Similars*. And where an external enemy was rich, such as the Athenian empire or, far above all, the empire of Persia, there was special reason to be suspicious of victorious commanders who might get their hands on enemy wealth. It might seem preferable, on balance (and perhaps after intense debate: Diod. Sic. 11.50 with de Ste Croix (1972) 170–1), for Sparta in the 470s to disengage from war against Persia and not to challenge Athens, in the interests of the – fragile – political and social harmony at home. Along with personal jealousy there is indeed, to explain Sparta's policy, a grand collective motive.

In explaining why Sparta withdrew from campaigning against Persia, and acquiesced in the rise of Athenian power, Thucydides alluded to 'internal wars'. What were they? There was, as we shall see, a long war against the *helots* – especially those of Messenia – which began in the mid-460s. Athenian troops were among those brought in by Sparta to resist the *helot* insurgents. This may be one reason why the Athenian Thucydides gives a few details about this conflict, when writing over half a century later. On other wars in the Peloponnese we know even less. Sparta's enduring power depended on the many thousands of hoplite allies from Peloponnesian states who regularly fought in the Spartan-led army. So the fact that some of those states had, soon after the Persian Wars, gone to war against Sparta was perhaps something the Spartans later might wish not to mention. Why remind

other Greeks that Sparta's alliance was so vulnerable? There was, however, one reason for Sparta to boast on this subject. And Herodotos reports the boast. It concerned a military soothsayer, Tisamenos, one of the religious professionals who accompanied a Greek army and gave advice on military movements, and especially on their timing. This Tisamenos, a specialist from the state of Elis whom Sparta had imported for his skill,

took part with the Spartans in five very great and victorious contests ... The five contests were these: the first was ... at Plataia [against the Persians, 479], then came the one at Tegea against the Tegeates and Argives, after that the one at Dipaieis against all the Arkadians except the Mantineans, then the one against the Messenians ... and finally the one at Tanagra [458 or 457] against the Athenians and the Argives.

(Hdt. 9.35)

This list, in so far as we can check it from elsewhere, is in chronological order. Twice, then, in the period between 479 and the early 450s, Sparta had to fight Tegea. On the first occasion Tegea was allied to Argos, and on the second to fellow Arkadians. Argos, a *polis* of the north-eastern Peloponnese and comparable to Sparta in citizen numbers, was a perennial enemy but lacked Sparta's capacity for forming an enduring military alliance among neighbouring states. While Sparta, without our advantage of hindsight, could never be sure that Argos' defiance would not one day acquire crushing force, probably what worried Sparta more at this period was the hostility to Sparta of Tegea and other Arkadians. For Arkadia at other times supplied important contingents for the army of the Spartan alliance. Also, Tegea lay near north-east of the borders of Messenia, the territory where lived a large proportion of Sparta's subject population, the helots. If Tegea became a permanent enemy of Sparta, Messenia itself, and thus the Spartan economy, could be destabilized if runaway helots gained shelter, and perhaps established armed forces, in Tegean territory. That both Tegea and Argos fought Sparta twice in this period means that for each the first battle, although claimed by the Spartans as a victory, was not decisive. Each was ready for a second battle against Sparta before long. We do not know how emphatic was Sparta's second victory against Tegea (and fellow Arkadians) at Dipaieis. And certainly the second victory against Argos (and Athens) at Tanagra was not overwhelming; Athens was able within a year or so to gain control of the large territory (Boiotia) of which Tanagra was part. With her northern neighbours putting up sustained armed resistance, Sparta was in trouble.

Two other fragments of information point to further reasons for Spartan alarm about her dominance within the Peloponnese. The historian Diodorus of Sicily, writing in the Roman period but using a fourth-century BC Greek source, states – in connection with the year 471/0 – that 'the Eleians, who inhabited several small cities, now came together into one city which was

named Elis' (11.54.1). Eleian territory lay to the north west of Messenia. And the coming-together of villagers to form a single (defensible) city was typically associated with the formation of *dēmokratia* against the Spartan interest. Sparta preferred that allied states of the Peloponnese were governed by oligarchies, that is by rural landlords ruling over a scattered agricultural population far from the safety of city walls. The *synoikism* into the single city of Elis was either done in defiance of Sparta, or at the very least threatened Spartan dominance in the area.

Our other fragment of information, this time from the more reliable Thucydides, concerns Themistokles. This astute politician and strategist, praised to a unique degree by Thucydides for foresight and rapid, successful improvisation (1.138.3),² had been exiled from his home city of Athens. Sparta would not forget the commanding role he had played in deploying the Athenian fleet alongside Sparta during the Persian invasion of 480–79. Nor would the Spartans forget, in quite a different way, how Themistokles had afterwards used up his political capital at Sparta. In the aftermath of the Persian defeat, he had been welcomed at Sparta with the greatest – indeed spectacular – honours. Later, however, Athens, began – on Themistokles' advice – to rebuild her ruined defensive walls (Thuc. 1.89.2–92). The Spartans objected, privately but patently wishing for Athens to remain open to invasion and thus more easily influenced either by fear of Spartan attack, or by the need for Spartan aid against attack from elsewhere. Themistokles, with a deceitfulness which his Spartan admirers were not expecting, came to Sparta again, to give assurances that Athens was *not* rebuilding its walls, while secretly urging the Athenians to rebuild with all speed. When he received news that the wall was at last defensible, he informed the Spartans that Athens now had the means to be independent, and that Sparta should accept the fact. This time, we can be sure, Themistokles left Sparta without the splendid official send-off which had marked his previous visit. He, and his state, had moved a long way towards becoming enemies of Sparta.

Later still, perhaps in the early 460s, Themistokles found himself formally exiled – ostracized – from Athens. Thucydides tells us that he went to live at Argos, and from that base made 'frequent visits to the rest of the Peloponnese' (1.135.3). Sparta reacted ferociously, persuading the Athenians to convert their ostracism of Themistokles into full-blown persecution. Closely pursued by Spartan and Athenian agents, Themistokles fled for refuge to Persia, the arch-enemy which he had done so much to defeat. That gives a measure of the danger he felt himself to be in from Sparta, and in turn suggests how fearful Sparta had become of him. What had he been doing on his 'frequent visits to the rest of the Peloponnese'? Almost certainly he had been persuading states of the northern and central Peloponnese of why they should oppose Sparta, and of how they should do it. The formidable political intelligence of the man had been recognized by the Spartans, as it would be later by Thucydides. And

with his record as a triumphant strategist against Persia, combined with the intimate knowledge of the Spartan high-command which he had gained in the process, Themistokles – even as an exile – might prove very persuasive. He may, for all we know, have helped promote the hostility to Sparta which Tegea and Argos showed at this period. And we should not assume that Themistokles restricted his ‘frequent visits’ only to the centre and north of the Peloponnese, outside Spartan territory. Thucydides says that from Argos he visited ‘the rest’ of the Peloponnese. Strictly, that expression should include Sparta’s own territories of Lakonia and Messenia, which together formed almost half of the landmass of Peloponnese. If so, Themistokles would quite likely be fomenting anti-Spartan revolution among the helots. Indeed the Spartans associated his activity with that of their own problematic leader Pausanias (Thuc. 1.135.2), himself accused of stirring up helot revolt.

By collaborating with Sparta in the expulsion of Themistokles from Greece, Athens did not manage to protect herself from Spartan aggression for long. When (probably in 465) an important state of Athens’ alliance, Thasos in the far north of the Aegean, revolted from that alliance and asked for help from Sparta, Thucydides reports that the Spartans ‘gave a promise, hidden from the Athenians, that they would help’, by invading Athens’ homeland, ‘and were on the point of doing so, but were prevented by the earthquake at which the helots ... revolted against them and took to Mount Ithome’ (1.101.2). These few words of Thucydides again cast a bright light on large areas of Sparta’s thinking. In spite of all the recent troubles in northern Peloponnese, Sparta was ready to lead a full-scale invasion against the most powerful city of central Greece. Her sense of timing, her acute eye for an Athenian weakness to exploit, is now exemplified: we shall see shortly that such well-timed aggression by Sparta formed a pattern. In the present case, Sparta could predict that Athenian land-troops would be tied down in large numbers and for many months in laying siege to the town of Thasos. Sparta’s remarkably consistent behaviour in matching aggressive moves to a prospective opponent’s times of weakness suggests that the desire *in principle* to attack may have existed in Sparta for some time, rigorously kept in check until occasion should present. Sparta’s citizen troops, heavily outnumbered (by helots and others) even in their own homeland, were not expendable. It was important to make war with an economy of losses. And if Sparta indeed could keep hostility in suspense, targeting another Greek state long before attacking it, the logic of secrecy is clear. The target was not to be given long advance notice, allowing it to make its own preparations, and perhaps even to look in turn for Spartan weaknesses to exploit. Here we see Sparta’s characteristic secrecy, noted elsewhere by Thucydides as a general phenomenon, recorded by the same author in the particular case of Thasos, and linked with Sparta’s planned invasion of Attike in the mid 460s.

The desired invasion did not happen. Sparta’s most intimate and feared enemy

of all was in arms: the helots. They themselves, as Aristotle would later write (*Politics* 1269a), looked out in general for weaknesses of Sparta to exploit, and in (or very soon after) 465 such a weakness arrived. Sparta was afflicted by earthquake: ‘the great earthquake’, as Thucydides would call it (1.128.1). Modern scholars have sometimes suspected that Sparta’s citizen demography was damaged gravely and for ever by the numbers killed as buildings collapsed (Hodkinson (2000) 417–20). The scale of the helot revolt was correspondingly great. Thucydides says that ‘the helots’ (rather than ‘some’ or ‘most’ of them) took part. Herodotos refers to a war now against ‘all the Messenians’. But since Thucydides in this connection helpfully tells us that the helots in general, whether from Lakonia or Messenia, were called simply ‘the Messenians’, Herodotos may mean here exactly what Thucydides himself suggests: that virtually all of Sparta’s unfree subjects rose up. Even two communities of the normally-loyal *perioikoi* revolted, which Sparta would have found especially worrying. The Spartan army depended on perioikic hoplites for its expeditions abroad, and no doubt also for police actions at home against helots. It took Sparta years to put down the revolt: between nine and ten years, according to the surviving text of Thucydides; the order of events in his narrative may, however, suggest about half that time (1.103.1 with Gomme (1945) 302–3, 401–11). The helots withdrew to the mountain range of Ithome in northern Messenia, from which the classic Spartan method of soldiering, the hoplite phalanx advancing on level ground, could not dislodge them. Sparta called in allies from other Greek states, a sign of near-desperation, since outsiders were not usually to be shown evidence of how fragile was Sparta’s control over its huge subject population. Among those brought in now were hoplites in large numbers from Athens. Rather than let the helot revolt succeed, Sparta preferred to take the risk of inviting in soldiers from a powerful rival state, one which she had, very recently, targeted for aggression.

The Athenian presence at Mount Ithome was not a success. Alone of the various allied contingents which came to help, Athens’ was sent away. The reason, according to Sparta, was that the Athenian force was no longer needed. But, Thucydides adds, the real reason was that the Spartans felt that they could not trust the Athenians, and even feared that their soldiers would promote revolution and go over to the enemy, helot, side (1.102.3). The Athenians, after all, came from a democratic *polis*, and it might not take much imagination for them to see the (Greek-speaking) helots as the true *dēmos* of the southern Peloponnese, oppressed by landowning oligarchs, the Spartans. Here, also, is another reference by Thucydides to Spartan attempted deception of the Athenians. They would not tell the Athenians the true reason for their dismissal, rather as they tried to keep secret their earlier promise to attack Athenian territory.

11.2 Clashing with Athens: The ‘First Peloponnesian War’, c.458–446/5

Sparta’s treatment of the Athenians was, of course, deeply provocative. Athens would reflect that her soldiers had been fighting abroad, and no doubt dying, for the Spartans, only to be insulted. The pro-Spartan politicians at Athens who had promoted the venture were discredited. Their chief, the soldierly Kimon who had led the Athenian force to Messenia in person, was ostracized. Athens found new allies, enemies of Sparta: Thessaly and Argos. And there began a period of intermittent hostilities between Athens and Sparta, sometimes called the ‘First Peloponnesian War’, which lasted until 446/5. Sparta’s alliance, in the northern Peloponnese and beyond, frayed under Athenian pressure. As well as the old enemy, Argos, now being allied to Athens, Megara, strategically occupying the narrow land route north from Corinth towards Athens, left the Spartan alliance and joined Athens, perhaps in 460. The island state of Aigina was conquered by Athens (457 or thereabouts). This development was particularly worrying and humiliating for Sparta; the Aiginetans had only recently sent troops of their own to help the Spartans at Ithome – indeed, those troops may still have been there. And yet Sparta could not prevent her benefactor Aigina from being conquered by the Athenian navy, and reduced permanently to subject status within the Athenian empire. An Athenian fleet burnt Sparta’s own dockyard, at Gytheion. Also in the 450s, Athens further eroded Sparta’s prestige and power in the Peloponnese by making alliances with Akhaia in the north west and Troizen in the north east (111.3, 115.1).

Sparta would not have predicted *in detail* this successful outburst of Athenian aggression at her expense. But that there would be expensive trouble with Athens could be predicted as a result of the dismissal of Athenian forces and the discrediting of those Athenian politicians who had taken a pro-Spartan line. Should we see Sparta’s rejection of Athens’ help at Ithome as short-sighted? Such criticisms are often made of the Spartans (see [Chapter 1](#)). But it is probably better to remember that Sparta’s primary danger was not from Athens but from her helots. When, in 370, Sparta did permanently lose Messenia, she lost in consequence her status as a great power in Greece. The Spartans should perhaps be given credit instead for *far-sightedness*, for understanding how their position would be undermined if they were to lose control of the Messenian population and lands. To understand how much of a risk the ‘alien’ Athenian troops at Ithome in the 460s posed to that control, we should need to know what Sparta at that time learned of the behaviour and attitudes of those Athenians. And that we cannot know. Sparta’s disobliging conduct, expensive though it proved, may have been a necessary precaution. One further possibility should briefly be mentioned. The Spartans, according to Thucydides, feared the revolutionary character of the Athenians, feared that they would be ‘persuaded by the [Messenians] on Ithome’. Probably there

were opportunities for contact between opposing forces at Ithome, for fraternizing and desertion. But the opportunities for the democratic Athenian soldiers to talk to Sparta's allies, and to Spartans themselves, would be far greater. We have seen ([Chapter 1](#)) that Sparta's fear of revolution within her *own* citizen population was probably far livelier and better-founded than the Spartans liked to admit. Of course Spartan authorities would hardly admit to outsiders that Athenian troops were giving their own men revolutionary ideas. But when a regime fails in war, it is vulnerable to criticism from within. In ancient Greece, as in the modern world, lost or unpopular wars tend to bring down governments. As Spartan and allied troops failed – over years, as we have seen – to make much progress against the helots of Ithome, there must have been criticism of the Spartan authorities among Spartan soldiers, fed up, uncomfortable even by Spartan standards, far from home and from their wives. Compare the fierce Spartan treatment, for supposed military failure, of the kings Leotychidas (in the 470s), Pleistoanax (in 446–5), and Agis (in 418). Amid any internal Spartan dissensions generated by the Ithome campaign, the Spartan authorities would not want revolutionary Athenians present and, in the ironic French expression, ‘making their little music’.

Sparta never did gain the crushing victory she required over the rebels of Ithome. After the years of Messenian resistance, the Spartans found a face-saving solution. A prophecy attributed to Delphic Apollo was discovered, requiring that Sparta ‘let go the suppliant of Zeus at Ithome’: rebel soldiers, their children and their wives were allowed to leave. Sparta thus got rid of impressive agitators, rather as she had got rid of the Athenian hoplites a few years earlier, and rather as she would free herself (this time by killing) 2000 of the most impressive helots in the 420s. The Athenians gave shelter to the exiled helots from Ithome, and, ‘out of hatred now for the Spartans’, formed them into a colony – an anti-Spartan strongpoint for the future – at Naupaktos, facing the northern Peloponnese from across the Corinthian Gulf (Thuc. 1.103.1–3). Religious prophecy played a large part in Spartan decisions, at times of obvious crisis. In determining the fate of problematic Spartan kings, divination was of immense influence; references to it form a surprisingly large part of our ancient information on Sparta's internal politics. It may be tempting to see the Spartans (and the Athenians, similarly attached to oracles and omens) as in this way quite remote in mentality from modern populations. Certainly, Greek religion and its prophecies were more open to freelance invention than are the text-based religions of the modern world. But the populations of modern states can also be surprisingly interested in informal prophecies during the most worrying crises: for example, during the bleakest period of World War II astrology extended its influence to almost half of the population of Britain (Powell (2010), drawing on Mass- Observation (1947) 60), while in Germany Goebbels' propaganda ministry took steps to regulate the communications of soothsayers. In the case of Sparta, prophecies supposedly from Delphi were in the keeping of the kings. Political authorities,

that is, controlled what could obviously be political instruments. The 'Delphic' prophecy about Ithome had special political usefulness. While many Messenians, the hard core on Ithome, were given freedom to leave the territory, many, probably the vast majority of helots, were not. That majority was not to be encouraged for the future by the thought that their fellow-Messenians on Ithome had been powerful enough to make the Spartans give them up. The 'Delphic' prophecy, quite likely invented for the occasion according to Sparta's tradition of strategic deception, prevented a subversive precedent being set. Sparta could claim that she had not been forced to free the helots through their own power of resistance. It was Zeus and Apollo who had decided the matter. Remaining helots were not to suppose that Sparta would free rebel helots in future.

As Athens in the 450s multiplied interventions in central Greece and the Peloponnese, Sparta in Thucydides' account did relatively little in opposition. But what she did do is significant. In 458 (or 457), perhaps when the great helot insurrection was still in progress, Sparta led the main army of her alliance north into central Greece, and fought a full-scale battle against Athens and allies at Tanagra in Boiotia. Sparta won, but casualties on both sides were high and the Spartan army withdrew, leaving Athens to win a follow-up battle at Oinophyta two months later in Sparta's absence and thus to gain control of Boiotia for some ten years. What motivated Sparta's intervention at the time of the Tanagra campaign? Athens' hostility by now was clear; she had allied with Sparta's long-time enemies Argos and Thessaly, and was threatening Sparta's allies. But why should Sparta choose to strike *at this point*? Friends and allies were no doubt clamouring for Spartan assistance against expanding Athenian power. Aigina, in particular, was under severe attack from Athens (and, following Athenian success at Oinophyta, would surrender to Athens). But Thucydides tells also that there was reason for Sparta to expect to have special leverage at the time of the Tanagra campaign. Athenians opposed to the democratic regime in their own city were themselves calling for Sparta to attack (1.107.4). Sparta could hope for Athens to be distracted and divided by a revolutionary uprising; she might even hope for the supreme economy of bringing about regime change within Athens without having to fight a battle. Such hopes were disappointed.

In the early 440s Sparta sent a force north again, this time to effect regime change at Delphi, a tiny state of central Greece with great moral importance (1.112.5). The shrine of Apollo at Delphi issued prophecies which Sparta took very seriously. By imposing a friendly government at Delphi, Sparta hoped for the precious privilege of rapid access to the shrine, *promanteia*. Evidently demand for divination was great. Delphic prophecies were composed in verse, and needed to strike a difficult balance. They had to be clear enough to inspire confidence, but vague and riddling enough to protect the shrine from being discredited by an unfortunate outcome. To create a prophecy for a major state

was to take a very public risk. Devising the prophecy would take time, and the stateliness of religious ritual would also involve delay. The religious-minded Spartans had good reason to wish to be at the head of the queue for divination, rather than at its end.

Soon afterwards, in the period 447–6, came a related cluster of setbacks for Athens: here was an especially promising opportunity for Sparta. First, the states of Boiotia revolted against Athenian rule, successfully: they defeated Athens at the infantry battle of Koroneia. Then, just east of Boiotia and across the Euripos channel, the long and strategic island of Euboia itself revolted from Athens. Athenian forces crossed to the island, only to learn that, in their rear, the territory of Megara, lying between Athens and Corinth, had reverted to the Spartan alliance. Sparta could now easily pass into Athens' homeland, Attike. And in fact a large army, led by Sparta, was poised to do just that. Very likely the cluster of reverses for Athens had happened in concertation with Sparta. Back from Euboia came the Athenians, to defend against the Spartan army. But no battle occurred. The Spartans penetrated a short distance into Attike – and then went home. Sparta's government punished the general responsible, the young king Pleistoanax – son of the regent Pausanias who had been put to death by the Spartan authorities several decades earlier. Pleistoanax was exiled, accused of taking a bribe from the Athenians rather than exploiting fully, as a good Spartan, the moment of Athens' vulnerability. Whether Pleistoanax, knowing his father's fate, would have risked betraying his country for cash seems doubtful. He may have believed, in accordance with Sparta's economy over manpower, that the revolts from Athens of Boiotia (which proved to be permanent), of Megara (also permanent) and of Euboia (which Athens did reconquer) were enough of a gain, when combined with the shock of a limited invasion by Sparta of Athens' homeland. To return to Sparta without losing a single Spartan soldier in battle, and with Athens diminished and scared, may have seemed to him enough. With our hindsight, however, we can see an enduring pattern of hostility within Sparta to its kings, a pattern which would last long after Pleistoanax. A young man, and therefore of limited political experience, he perhaps underestimated the strength of domestic opponents who were themselves awaiting their opportunity, waiting for Sparta's own dyarch to make a false move. Pleistoanax's exile would last for almost twenty years. It ended, as we shall see, after the Delphic oracle intervened in his favour, an intervention which the king's Spartan opponents would also ascribe to bribery.

11.3 Uneasy Peace between Sparta and Athens, 446/5–431

By punishing Pleistoanax, Sparta's government effectively signalled to the

wider world that it considered his campaign against Athens as a failure. This inevitably discouraged Sparta's allies from marching north again in a hurry; why exert themselves a second time to follow a leadership which Sparta itself admitted to have been corrupt? Instead, Sparta obtained from Athens a peace-treaty nominally for thirty years. Athens gave up the territories, or fortified positions, which it still held in the Peloponnese and Megara. Sparta effectively recognized the Athenian empire, including even Aigina, until recently Sparta's energetic ally. In the treaty it was stipulated that, if dispute arose between the parties, it should be submitted to peaceful arbitration. As regularly in Greece, the treaty was confirmed not with official signatures but with religious oaths sworn on behalf of each state.

The fate of this formal treaty shows both the importance and the limits of religious motivation on the Spartan side. For, as we shall see, Sparta would – in 431 – break her oaths by going to war while refusing Athens' offer of arbitration. But when the resulting war led to poor results, Spartans saw their failure as a divine punishment for their oath-breaking, and would seemingly postpone further aggression by waiting for a moment when Athens, and not Sparta, was religiously in the wrong. After the swearing of the Thirty Years' Peace, the first serious Spartan impulse to renew war comes – so far as we can tell – in 440–39. The moment was identified for modern scholarship by Geoffrey de Ste. Croix (1972, 200–3), who noticed the significance of a glancing reference in Thucydides (1.41.2). Corinthian speakers in the late 430s claimed publicly that their city had prevented Athens from being attacked by 'the Peloponnesians' – in other words, by the Peloponnesian league, led by Sparta – when the large and important island of Samos was in revolt from Athens (440–39). Now, there could probably have been no question of Peloponnesian help to Samos against Athens if Sparta had been opposed. If the Corinthians were speaking truthfully, Sparta was more likely known to want war, a war in which the Corinthian navy – more potent than Sparta's – might have to take the main risks against an Athenian fleet which had triumphed over Peloponnesian navies in the Aegean in the 450s. Corinth might well refuse, and block, such a Spartan plan. On the other hand, for Sparta to seek to exploit against Athens the moment of her distraction by powerful Samos fits into a pattern of Spartan opportunism which emerges more and more clearly – for us – as events of the fifth century unfold.

11.4 The Peloponnesian War of 431–404

Sparta, in the event, did not move against Athens in 440–39. Indeed, her state of mind at the period is relatively obscure, even by Sparta's own dark standards. But the next occasion on which Sparta attacked Athens is one of the moments of ancient history most fully described (by ancient writers), and

most argued over (by modern scholars): the outbreak of what is called, following Thucydides' definition of events, 'The Peloponnesian War', in 431. Thucydides introduces with a roll of drums his explanation of why the war broke out (1.1; 5.26). The war, as he defined it, was a superb subject for study. It was on a grander scale, he stated, than any Greek war before it. And because he, as its historian, had lived right through its twenty-seven years, as an adult witness with access both to Athenians and (during his exile) to the Peloponnesians, he was unusually well placed to write accurately about it. His account of the last years of the war, from late 411 to 404, has not survived. Perhaps he did not live to complete it. This may partly explain why modern historians have paid so little attention to the unpredictable way in which the war ended, with the Spartans refusing to destroy or even to loot the enemy capital, Athens, which had surrendered and was at their mercy. But on the causes of the outbreak of war in 431, scholars have followed Thucydides' surviving text in its intensity of focus. The historian wrote, he said, to remove doubts: 'so that no one should ever have to ask how the Greeks became involved in such a great war' (1.23.5). For him, 'the truest explanation, least uttered, was – I think – that the Athenians growing great and frightening the Spartans made war inevitable. On the other hand, the accusations made openly on both sides, on the basis of which they dissolved the peace treaty and went to war, were as follows ...' (1.23.6). Thucydides then gives a long narrative of two episodes, stretching from 433 to the outbreak of the great war in 431, in which Athens clashed with Corinth, one of Sparta's most important allies. First, the Athenian navy defended Corinth's hated ex-colony in north-western Greece, Kerkyra (also called 'Corcyra' by historians: modern Corfu), and so prevented Corinth from inflicting punishment on the men of Kerkyra. Corinth retaliated by sending a large and allegedly unofficial force to help another former colony, this time Poteidaia in the north east, in its attempt to revolt from the Athenian empire. Athens defeated Corinth's force, and besieged it in Poteidaia. Corinth, humiliated and scared for the fate of its men, pressed Sparta to help by making war on Athens. Other allies of Sparta added their voices, including Megara, also now under pressure from Athens. Aigina too, once a precious Spartan ally but now firmly under Athenian control, made complaints to Sparta secretly.

Sparta did indeed have things to fear. Corinth, in its desperation, might even try to break away from the Spartan hegemony and to construct an alliance of its own, perhaps with Boiotia or even Argos. For Sparta to be seen as incapable of defending its allies would obviously encourage the latter to make their own arrangements. Thucydides recounts formal discussion in the full assembly of Spartan citizens as to whether to begin war with Athens. Sthenelaïdas, one of the Spartan ephors, is shown making a crude but effective speech about not abandoning allies. In opposition, Sparta's king Archidamos argued for accepting Athens' offer of arbitration, in accordance with the existing treaty. Any war with Athens was likely to be a long one, Archidamos

argued: Athens had more money than Sparta to fund campaigns, and its vastly superior fleet made it hard or impossible for Sparta’s main arm, infantry, to reach much of the Athenian empire (Thuc.1.80–6). Sthenelaïdas won the day, partly because he made the Spartan citizens vote visibly, those for and against war separating to different spots. Spartans’ famous physical courage depended importantly on a lack of moral courage. Military cowardice was vigorously despised, and even the accusation of it might be dreaded. In the visual, judgemental, culture of Sparta, to be *seen* voting against war was undesirable.

Modern scholars have themselves divided – over whether Sparta or Athens was more to blame for the outbreak of war. Those seeing Sparta as the more aggressive include, notably, de Ste. Croix, who points to a series of Spartan invasions of Attike, promised or actually executed, stretching back into the late sixth century ((1972) 3, 50, 167, 180). A problem for such a view is how to explain the long periods when Sparta did *not* attack Athens – as, for example, the fifteen years prior to 431. Other scholars, such as Donald Kagan ((1969) 346) and Russell Meiggs ((1972) 203–4), have seen Athenian aggression in the 430s as more responsible for the war. The corresponding problem for *this* view is how to account for the long sequence of clear Spartan hostility to Athens. It may be rather difficult for the mind to focus at once on evidence of aggression from *both* great powers (see [Chapter 1](#)). It is possible, however, to see Sparta as pursuing aggression against Athens fairly steadily and intelligently – in response, as Thucydides believed, to the growth of Athenian power. But we may not agree with Thucydides as to *when* Athenian power became for Sparta unbearably great.

In explaining any event, it is useful to ask ‘Why *now*?’. What was special about 432–1, to bring about war then? Sparta’s moments of aggressive initiative against Athens follow a remarkable pattern. That pattern emerges clearly when Thucydides’ narrative is examined. But the pattern is never made explicit by Thucydides, or by any of the speakers he reports. The pattern suggests virtually a formula, or rather two related but distinct formulae, operating in Spartan minds. Sparta never began a war against Athens unless Athens was distracted and weakened in some important way. And when Athens was so weakened, and Sparta was free to act, Sparta always or almost always opened a war against Athens. [Table 11.1](#) lists (Column I) such moments of Athenian weakness; particularly noteworthy are the revolts of Athenian allies and subjects, which caused Athens predictably to commit troops far from Attike. In Column II are the moments when Sparta hoped or decided to begin hostilities with Athens outside the Peloponnese.³

Table 11.1 Athens’ moments of vulnerability in peacetime and Sparta’s moments of aggression.

<i>I Sparta’s Opportunities</i>	<i>II Sparta Executes, or Considers, New Aggression</i>

465: Thasos revolts from Athens.	465–464: The Spartans promised the Thasians to invade Attike, and ‘were likely to do so’.
c.460–455: Athenian expedition to Cyprus and Egypt;	
c.459–457: Athens’ war with Aigina.	
458–457: Threat of treachery at Athens.	458–7: Spartan campaign to Tanagra
446: Defections of Euboia and Megara.	446: Spartans invaded Attike.
440–439: Revolts of Samos and Byzantion.	440–439: Conference of Peloponnesian league voted on whether to aid the Samians.
445–435(?): Proposed revolt of Lesbos.	
432: Revolts of Poteidaia, the Bottiaians and Chalkidians.	432: Spartan decision in favour of beginning (Peloponnesian) war.
415–413: Sicilian expedition.	415/4: Sparta reopens Peloponnesian war, arranges help for Syracuse, and plans to garrison Dekeleia in Attike.

The only moment where things may not tally concerns the proposed revolt of Lesbos from Athens. And that revolt we cannot date precisely; it may have occurred at a time (as after the revolt of Samos) when Sparta had learned that she could not in fact persuade her allies to follow her in the defence of a remote island. Apart from this one, doubtful, case, the correlation is complete: Athens’ difficulty was Sparta’s opportunity. We shall see in [Table 11.2](#) further below that similar rigorous thinking applied also to times when Sparta was already at war with Athens. Then, Sparta governed her campaigns into new areas by reference to special Athenian weakness, and again the revolts of Athenian allies provided a special incentive.

Table 11.2 Athens’ moments of vulnerability during war against Sparta, and Sparta’s moments of extending that war.

<i>I Sparta’s Opportunity</i>	<i>II Sparta Extends War Against Athens to a New Area</i>
428–427: Lesbos revolts from Athens.	427: Spartan-led fleet sent to E. Aegean to help Lesbos.
427: Revolution at Kerkyra.	427: Sparta sent fleet to Kerkyra.
425/4: Allies and former allies of Athens appealed for Spartan aid to Thraceward region.	424: Sparta sends Brasidas’ force to Thraceward area.
413–412: Aftermath of Athens’ Sicilian disaster. Revolts (proposed or consummated) of Chios, Erythrai,	412: Sparta assembled large fleet in E. Aegean and aided revolts of Chios, Erythrai, Lesbos, Knidos, Rhodes.

Lesbos, Euboea, Knidos, Rhodes.

412–411: Athenian siege of Khios.
Revolution of the Four Hundred at
Athens imminent or actual.

411: Spring. First Spartan incursion
into Hellespontine area.

These long sets of correlations perhaps reveal the best method of reconstructing Spartan mentality. We should look above all at Sparta's external, undeniable, acts. These are a corrective to Sparta's propaganda and to her ideological image among Greek writers (see [Chapter 1](#)). Sparta was not, as the Corinthians and even Thucydides suggested, generally 'slow' to go to war. Rather, she chose her moment; when that moment came, as it had come in 446, Sparta acted fast. No doubt she was concerned to spare her worryingly low citizen manpower; victories had to be won in the cheapest way. The correlations suggest that, since the 460s, Sparta had wished *in principle* for a war that would restrict Athens' power for ever. The only trigger needed, from the 460s onwards, was the special opportunity provided by a moment of Athenian weakness. What mattered most about the late 430s was not, as even Thucydides at one point suggests (1.118.2), that Athens was threatening states allied to Sparta. Such threats certainly helped to mobilize Sparta's allies. But the chief factor in Spartan minds in 431 was not the strength of her own alliance, but the perceived weakness in that of Athens. What exactly did that weakness consist of?

Sparta's main method of waging war abroad was the pitched battle, involving many thousands of hoplites, led by her own Spartiate (and perioikic) warriors of peerless reputation. Any development which caused the enemy phalanx to lack much of its normal complement not only made victory (even) more likely but also would reduce the prospective cost in Spartan casualties. Revolts by Athens' allies typically involved the siege of an allied city, tying down a large number of Athenian hoplites over many months. The siege of Poteidaia was impressive, even in prospect, and Poteidaia had been joined by two powerful neighbouring associations, the Chalkidians and Bottiaians. Athens never defeated the two latter. In her war against them and the Poteidaians, Athens seemingly never used less than 3000 hoplites; at one point almost 7000 were engaged, more than half of Athens' total.⁴ Poteidaia would hold out for more than two years. As to the financial cost to Athens of dealing with Poteidaia: it would prove to be some 2000 talents (Thuc.2.70.2), more than three times the entire annual revenue in tribute from the Athenian empire. All this could not be anticipated in detail by Sparta in 432–1. But the general scale of events was predictable; suppressing the revolt of Samos ten years earlier had cost some 1276 talents.⁵ We see why an extensive revolt such as this gave a promising occasion for Sparta to attack.

If the revolts of Poteidaia and allies were so important for Sparta's decision to go to war, why does Thucydides not dwell on this aspect more clearly? He may perhaps have taken for granted that his Greek readers would anyway

think in such terms; the notion of military *kairos*, of opportunity presented by an enemy's weakness, was far more prominent in Greek thinking than it is in our own.⁶ Also, Sparta itself, surely Thucydides' ultimate source for some of his detail for the debate involving Sthenelaïdas and Archidamos, may have been very reluctant to tell outsiders of their near-automatic exploitation of Athenian weakness. Not only would that allow enemies to predict and so exploit Sparta's future decisions; it might also reflect badly on the sincerity of Sparta in making peace treaties such as that of 446/5. For Thucydides' reticence about the strategic importance of Poteidaia for Sparta, there may be one further reason. If Spartans were, in their own minds, enduringly inclined to war with Athens from 465 to the end of the fifth century, that would call into question Thucydides' claim that the Peloponnesian War was as he defined it, a distinct and single process beginning in 431 and ending in 404. His theme, and his special authority to write on it as a contemporary, would have suffered. For events of the 440s and earlier were, as he explicitly admits, 'impossible to know exactly through the passage of so much time' (1.1.3). Authorial wishfulness may have discouraged him from examining the consistency of Spartan behaviour over a much longer period, for fear of finding that in reality the Peloponnesian War stretched back into the mists of time.

11.4.1 The 'Archidamian War', 431–421

The Peloponnesian War, on Thucydides' definition, began with allies of Sparta, the Thebans, attacking an ally of Athens, Plataia, in 431. But Sparta itself made the defining move of aggression. The Spartans, commanded by king Archidamos, led a full-scale army of the Peloponnesian alliance into Athens' homeland of Attike, and set about attacking the crops there. What was this meant to achieve? Sparta hoped that the Athenians would react in the way traditional for invaded states: by leading out their own infantry for pitched battle. Sparta's excellent hoplites were expected to win such a confrontation. Athens might then recognize her inferiority and make large concessions to secure peace. Not only was this a classic model of inter-state behaviour. It also corresponded with what had happened just fifteen years earlier. The shock of seeing a large Spartan-led army in their territory in 446 had helped to persuade the Athenians to make the Thirty Years' Peace, and to give up important possessions in the Peloponnese.

In this new war, however, the Athenians did not cooperate with the scenario envisaged by Sparta. Athenian troops between 431 and 404 never confronted the full army of the Spartan alliance in pitched battle. Accepting the strategy of Perikles, and adhering to it long after the latter's death (in 429), Athenian

troops, when faced with Spartan invasion, withdrew behind their city walls. Siege-craft at this period was primitive. The Spartans were quite unskilled in it and did not even attempt to assail Athens' walls. Attike outside the walls was treated by its citizens as temporarily expendable. Instead, Athenian naval forces intensified control over their empire, over far-flung coasts and islands of Greece beyond easy reach of the Spartan army. Sparta, until the last years of the Peloponnesian War following Athens' catastrophic loss of ships and men in Sicily (413), had no fleet capable of resisting for long the hundreds of Athenian triremes and the skilful crews. Spartans did, early in the war, repeatedly try to challenge Athenian sea-power. But the result was humiliating failure.

In most of years between 431 and 425 Sparta made a brief invasion of Attike with the grand army of her alliance, ravaging the crops, enraging and frightening the population. That this would not provoke a decisive battle must have become increasingly clear. However, one enormous advantage accrued to Sparta in an unexpected way. The Athenians, living in a city crowded with refugees from the countryside, were exposed to contagious disease. A plague now afflicted them repeatedly, killing – between 430 and 426 – perhaps a third of Athens' citizens. For Sparta this must have been profoundly encouraging, and not just for obvious reasons concerning enemy manpower. Before beginning the war, the Spartans – godfearing men with a traditional reverence for the shrine at Delphi – had received a prophecy: they would win the war against Athens, if they fought 'according to their strength', and Delphic Apollo would help them. Now, Apollo was god of plague: the most respected Greek poetry, that of Homer, portrayed Apollo unforgettably in the role of plague-sender. The disease which now fell so drastically upon Athens must have seemed utter confirmation of the god's prophecy, especially since Sparta itself escaped; the plague hardly touched the Peloponnese. In their affliction the Athenians sought peace with Sparta, and offered terms (430/29); Sparta refused. Evidently a grander victory seemed possible. Religious thinking seems to have intensified Spartan optimism. But, before long, divination of a different kind would work in the other direction.

With hoplite campaigning in Attike no longer promising a quick and decisive victory, Sparta looked elsewhere. Other traditional strategies of her own came into play. Exploiting enemy weakness was one such: when subjects or allies of Athens defected, or proposed to do so, Sparta would intervene. When Athens had other crippling problems, as revolution at home or large-scale defeat and loss overseas, Sparta moved to exploit the moment. Again, the pattern of Spartan strategy is best illustrated as in [Table 11.2](#), showing in parallel Athens' problem (Column I) and Sparta's new aggression in response (Column II).

Noteworthy is the way that Sparta repeatedly dared to use ships for long-distance interventions, such as those to Lesbos and Kerkyra in 427. Athenian

naval skill and numbers tended to rule the waves; for Spartan-led warships to be caught in the open by an Athenian force of comparable size was likely to be utter disaster. But Sparta could exploit the traditional advantage of the aggressor: surprise. Secrecy was itself a regular technique of Spartan warfare. Spartan ships setting off unobserved for an unannounced destination always stood a good chance of stealing through successfully. Spartan bravery had a role to play here too. In an age lacking radar and satellite intelligence, a Spartan flotilla could never be quite sure that it might not find, round the next headland, an Athenian fleet well placed to annihilate it. We shall see such courage succeeding when the Spartan Gylippos in 414, with a small force, braved and evaded the vast Athenian armada besieging Syracuse, managing to reach, and effectively to rescue the city – with results ultimately devastating for Athenian naval power.

In 425 Sparta's almost-annual invasions of Attike came to an abrupt end, not to be resumed until 413 and the great opportunity presented by Athens' expedition to Sicily. What stopped the invasions of the 420s was that Athens had won precious hostages. Some 120 Spartan citizens, many belonging to the most influential families of their city, had surrendered to Athenian forces. Taken to Athens, they stood to be put to death if Spartan troops crossed the Athenian frontier. This transformed the nature of the Peloponnesian War: for many years the moral superiority shifted to the Athenian side. The precious Spartan prisoners had been captured as follows, as the result of a clear-cut blunder by their commanders.

A passing Athenian flotilla in 425, delayed by bad weather on the western coast of Messenia – helot country – had improvised by building a small fort there, at Pylos. Sparta, fearful of anything which might encourage helots to revolt, moved a significant force of its own into position nearby. But here lay the blunder. That position was a small island. No doubt the isle of Sphakteria seemed so close to the mainland as to be easily accessible to Sparta's land forces, and immune to Athens' control of the sea. But Athenian ships managed to blockade it and to land footsoldiers of their own in overwhelming numbers. These light-armed men could easily evade the ponderously-armed Spartan hoplites, attacking them with missiles from a safe distance. In normal circumstances, Sparta would have used cavalry to keep away nimble attackers of this kind. But there was no cavalry on the island. Encircled, taking heavy losses and with missiles coming at them invisibly through smoke, Spartans lowered their shields and waved their hands in surrender.

In all the Peloponnesian War, writes Thucydides, no event caused as much surprise as this (4.40.1). The Greeks had expected that Spartans would die fighting, and never surrender while they still had food and weapons. From this simple statement we understand the huge military and political advantage which Sparta had enjoyed for years, resulting – above all – from her conduct in the Persian invasion of 480–79: from fighting to the last man at

Thermopylai, as well as from the victory at Plataia. From Thermopylai to Sphakteria, any Greek army thinking of opposing Sparta in the field knew that it was faced by supremely competent and unyielding bravery. Not only would enemy soldiers be demoralized by this; in many cases, unidentifiable today but important at the time, they would have decided not to fight Sparta at all. With the surrender on Sphakteria, this had apparently changed. Greeks talked of the Spartans having gone 'soft'. And Athens was rampant.

With some 120 of her citizens at the mercy of Athens, Sparta made repeated offers of peace, no doubt with more and more substantial concessions attached. Athens rejected them, and instead (in 424) compounded Sparta's problems by capturing the large island of Kythera, which lay off south-eastern Lakonia and was normally administered by Sparta. At Sparta itself there now occurred something quite exceptional: despair. Thucydides wrote:

The many pieces of ill fortune, coming together in a short time and contrary to reasonable expectation, had produced in them the greatest panic, and they feared a second disaster, like the one on the island [Sphakteria]. Consequently they became less bold still about facing battles and thought that whatever they attempted would fail, because they had lost confidence in their own judgement ...

(4.55.3–4).

Part of the reason for this despair was religious. For identifying the hand of divinity behind events, timing – synchronism or close sequence – was important: for example, if a possibly wicked act was followed promptly by unusual disaster, that might look like divinity at work. Thucydides' words on 'ill fortune, coming together in a short time' fit such thinking. Elsewhere, Thucydides reports that Spartans interpreted various setbacks in this war as due to offences by themselves against religion. For example, Sparta had – contrary to the sworn terms of the Thirty Years' Peace – refused to accept Athens' offer of arbitration in 431: in retrospect, the defeat at Sphakteria and other setbacks of the 420s seemed to Spartans to be divine retribution (7.18.2). Also, the position of Sparta's long-exiled king Pleistoanax divided Sparta profoundly, with religious arguments counting on both sides. Pleistoanax himself, and his supporters, exploited an oracle obtained from Delphi, urging Sparta to restore the king. He was, after much pressure from Delphi, duly restored amid great religious ceremony. But when Sparta continued to suffer failures in the war, Pleistoanax' enemies said that this was happening because his restoration itself had been wrong, that he had bribed Delphi to issue the prophecy in his favour, and that divinity was now punishing Sparta for this sin (5.16.1–17.1).

In short, religious reasoning about the future had ceased to deliver a confident consensus: Sparta was losing its necessary capacity for confident prediction along religious lines. And the same was true of secular calculation. It was not

just other Greeks who were shocked by the defeat and surrender of the Spartiates on Sphakteria. Sparta's own population had thought such things could not happen. Sparta's fears, secular and religious, would be a main reason for her making a truce with Athens in 423 and a supposedly permanent peace in 421. Because historians in modern times have overwhelmingly studied Greek history from an Athenian perspective, this settlement is usually called the 'Peace of Nikias', after the Athenian soldier-politician who championed it in his own city. But the treaty might equally be called the 'Peace of Pleistoanax', since Thucydides gives similar emphasis to the Spartan king's role, stressing how influentially Pleistoanax within his own state pressed for peace. War was always quite likely to bring disasters, Pleistoanax reasoned, and he feared his enemies within Sparta would explain them – obviously with some plausibility – as divine punishment for his supposedly impious action. It may well be that from 425 to 421 there was a preponderant wish for peace among the Spartans. But until 421 Athens would not agree. Sparta therefore had to make war in profoundly-changed circumstances. This she did, with chilling dishonesty and considerable success.

An immediate priority for Sparta was to secure the massive and restless helot population against revolt. One device, recounted by Thucydides (4.80), amounted to ingenious terrorism by the state. The authorities invited helots themselves to claim who had been the most effective helpers of Sparta in war: such men would be given their freedom. Sparta wished to identify the boldest helots, as being those who might be the most dangerous leaders of any revolt. The general principle of prediction was quite astute: we think of how – over two millennia later – Major George Washington, a most effective servant of the British Crown in war against the French, would become the most successful revolutionary against the Crown in alliance with the French. But Sparta's subsequent recorded action recalls the darkest episodes of modern European history. The promise implicitly made to the helots, 'Work makes you free', was the one written over the gate of Auschwitz. Some 2000 helots were identified as especially deserving, and they began to celebrate their liberation. Sparta then killed them all, secretly: 'No one knew how each of them died'.

Modern scholars are divided as to whether this murderous episode, as described by Thucydides, could possibly have happened (e.g. Paradiso (2004), Harvey (2004)): such cynical behaviour has seemed incredible, if not impractical. How, for one thing, could helots thereafter have continued to fight for Sparta, as they in fact did (see later below)? What few scholars have recognized is the advanced capacity of Sparta for organized deception on a grand scale (see [Chapter 1](#)). Such mendacity, allied with secrecy, is described by all our most important contemporary sources for Sparta. Once it is recognized, the grim episode of the 2000 becomes less unlikely; indeed we

even see a reason why Spartan sources may have divulged the outline of their plot to Thucydides or his source(s). It is clear from other cases that Spartans might be *proud* of the capacity for such deception. They were soldiers, and trickery was a weapon of war. We may ask whether the helots were a proper object of war. Helots are sometimes described, even in Thucydides, as ‘slaves’ (5.23.3; 8.40.2). If helots had been mere property, how could a man make war on his own property? We recall the evidence reported from Aristotle (by Plutarch, *Lyc.* 28): that every year Spartan authorities made a formal declaration of war on the helots, so that killing them should be religiously permissible. Clearly the relations between master and helot were not simple: they involved complicated humanity – and inhumanity.

The numbers of the helots, in relation to the 3000 or so Spartan male citizens of fighting age at this period, were clearly vast. To kill 2000 of the fittest was reckoned compatible with maintaining the agricultural economy which the helots worked, and on which the Spartans lived (cf. Hodkinson (2000) 421–2). Indeed, even more helots needed to be got out of the way. Perhaps because the disappearance of the conspicuous 2000 had already been noticed, with suspicion if not horror, by the helots in general, Sparta might need to offer some extra reassurance if further helots were to be induced to volunteer for military service. Such volunteers were secured: what Sparta could offer them as a pledge was, to put heavy weapons into their hands – so that they could campaign, 700 of them, as hoplites far from their homes. They would go to northern Greece, commanded by Sparta’s greatest hero of the day, Brasidas.⁷ There they would campaign against the Athenian empire, evidently already with the idea – which later materialized – of capturing towns which could then be used as bargaining counters to secure the release of the prisoners from Sphakteria.

Because Brasidas’ campaign was, as we know with hindsight, remarkably successful, it is tempting to assume without much thought that the Spartan authorities foresaw with confidence the manner of its success. Such hindsight is dangerous. Instead, one should look carefully at what reasons the Spartan authorities had, *at the time*, for launching troops very far from home, into territory to which Athens’ navy gave much swifter and more flexible access than Brasidas’ footsoldiers would have. We recall that the Spartans were, at this period, somewhat desperate. Their classic strategy, of invading Attike, was barred to them: their precious fellow-citizens, prisoners at Athens, risked execution – perhaps in front of their eyes – the moment a Spartan army crossed the frontier. The campaign to northern Greece was a reaction of extraordinary economy, satisfying many criteria at once. The Spartans were being invited by local insurgents, and thus had the special opportunity which Sparta regularly required before a new military venture (Thuc. 4. 79.2, 80.1). The remote area gave Sparta a chance of damaging Athenian interests without harming the Spartan prisoners. It got rid of yet more impressive young helot

fighters. And Brasidas' irregular army carried the mystique due to a great Spartan commander.

Brasidas' force seems to have involved few, if any, Spartiates other than its commander. Spartans thereby avoided the risk of losing even more of their precious citizen manpower, of suffering the 'second disaster' which Thucydides records them as fearing. Not only could few Spartiates be killed; few, in the worst case, could surrender. Sparta at this stage must have feared another Sphakteria. After Sphakteria, any Spartan soldier tempted to surrender would be soothed, emboldened, by the moral precedent: his force would not now be the *first* Spartans to surrender. And if Spartans en masse were to surrender again, Sparta's unique military reputation might be lost for ever. Exceptional care was evidently needed to shield Spartiates from danger. Similar thinking lay behind another hugely successful Spartan campaign, to be considered shortly: Gylippos' voyage to besieged Syracuse in 414 with, once more it seems, no significant number of other Spartans. Gylippos was greeted by the Syracusans, previously desperate, with enormous relief and then optimism: behind him was perceived, although invisible, all the famous might of Sparta. Sparta had learned to project almost a *virtual* army or navy.

On his way northward Brasidas saved from Athens the strategically important city of Megara, near the frontier of Attike and otherwise likely to fall into Athenian hands. He later exaggerated and lied, about the circumstances of his success at Megara in order to impress Greek peoples further north. And Thucydides, in a rare comment about a speaker's honesty, notes Brasidas' untruthfulness (4.108.5). Another Spartan technique for keeping enemies in the dark was military movement by night. Brasidas successfully applied this against the town of Torone and, most importantly, Amphipolis. This city, a colony created by Athens only recently (in 437/6), was a jewel close to Athenian hearts. Strategically placed on the River Strymon, accessible to Athenian warships but well placed to block enemy land armies moving eastwards or westwards, Amphipolis also aided and protected Athenian economic interests in the area. Timber, vital for Athens' navy and in short supply from mainland Greece, was one of the gifts of Amphipolis. But Brasidas surprised the town with his approach by night. He captured citizens outside the walls, as hostages. He offered generous terms of surrender: even the Athenians living inside the town would be allowed to stay. And, Thucydides tellingly states, 'he spoke very well – for a Spartan': he was, in short, a smooth diplomat as well as a remarkable soldier. Amphipolitans fell under his spell. He won over their city, which Athens, for all its efforts over many later decades, would never get back. When he was killed in battle outside their city in 422, the men of Amphipolis buried Brasidas with superhuman honours.

The various towns which Brasidas won over would, in spite of his own wishes, be used after his death by Sparta as bargaining counters. In exchange

for a general peace, some were given back to Athens, though Amphipolis itself managed to maintain its independence, with Spartan connivance. Brasidas' campaign restored, to a degree, Spartan pride and morale, as well as reducing the optimism of Athenians. It thus made possible the treaty of peace sworn by Sparta and Athens in 421 and supposed to last for fifty years. But perhaps Brasidas' most important legacy was to prepare Greek minds for, and to raise their expectations concerning, the Spartan hegemony which might – and in the event did – follow the downfall of the Athenian empire. According to Thucydides (4.81), Greeks expected that other Spartan commanders who might be sent out in the future would be like Brasidas: that is, virtuous and highly competent 'in every way', merciful and diplomatic. Brasidas thus facilitated the widespread revolts from Athens of major allies in and around the Aegean, which would follow the catastrophic defeat (in 413) of Athens' imperial expedition to Sicily. He paved the way for the Spartan hegemony over Greece (404–371). But by raising high expectations, Brasidas accentuated the fierce disillusion which would spread in Greece, even among Sparta's partisans, when many Spartan commanders after 404 proved violent, cruel and clumsy.

To understand Sparta's actions abroad, and her conduct towards her great rival, Athens, we need again to consider tensions within the ruling group of Spartan citizens. Brasidas' campaign in the north had not been reinforced from Sparta, at an important stage, in part 'because the leading men were jealous of him' (Thuc. 4.108.7). When Brasidas died fighting an Athenian army outside Amphipolis, accomplishing a victory with supreme Spartan economy as well as personal bravery (some 600 died on the Athenian side, and only seven, including Brasidas, on the Spartan), there was no doubt much relief and satisfaction back at Sparta. Sparta knew how to exploit the memory of dead heroes; living ones, in contrast, might get out of hand.

11.4.2 Uneasy and interrupted peace with Athens, 421–414

Different personal resentments, as we have seen, aimed at reducing or eliminating the influence of king Pleistoanax. And this had a profound effect on Sparta's foreign policy, by making Pleistoanax a predominant voice for peace in 421; peace offered the safest personal prospects for himself. His fellow king Agis similarly came under intense personal pressure. After what seemed a military failure by himself against Argos, fellow-Spartans came close to imposing a colossal fine on him and to destroying his house – in other words, almost certainly, to forcing him into exile. The peace treaty with Athens (421) won back for Sparta her citizen prisoners from Sphakteria. These men, however, were deprived for a time of important political rights;

the Spartan authorities suspected that the men, fearing a humiliating future, might attempt revolution. In addition to these enduring tensions within her own citizen body, Sparta was troubled by discontent and insubordination within her alliance. Corinth, Megara and Boiotia would not swear to the peace with Athens: each resented the loss of territory which the peace required. Elis similarly would not swear. In 418, Athens was able – in breach of the peace treaty – to assemble a large hoplite army against Sparta *within* the Peloponnese, something she had not achieved during the hostilities of 431–421. In that army, on Athens' side, was not only Argos, Sparta's traditional foe of the north-eastern Peloponnese, but also Mantinea, a city of Arkadia, just north of Lakonia, and normally an important member of Sparta's hoplite alliance. Such was the damage done to Sparta by her performance in the fighting of 431–21, and by the terms of the peace, that her traditional alliance was in a wretched state, and could not be depended upon to support military expeditions.

The battle fought at Mantinea in 418 against the alliance of Athens, Argos and Mantinea itself was won by Sparta. Other Greeks revised the idea they had formed from the surrender at Sphakteria: after Mantinea, they no longer thought that the Spartans had 'gone soft' (Thuc. 5.75.3). But even after this battle, which proved that Athens had deeply belligerent intentions, the Spartans would not resume aggressive war. And in part this was due, once more, to religious considerations. Spartans, who believed themselves, as we have seen, to have been divinely punished for breaking an earlier sworn treaty, were anxious not to re-offend. Informing this religious argument may be a version of Sparta's traditional secular confidence: all their setbacks in the 420s could not have been, surely, a consequence of technical failings by themselves in the political and military spheres. Something *very* unusual, such as a religious offence, was surely needed to explain how mighty Sparta had fallen so low. Still less might Spartans admit to themselves that Athens' success had been due to Athens' own positive qualities. In this, the Spartans would be exemplifying a commonplace psychology of the defeated, often apparent in modern sport. Defeat is far more commonly attributed to defects in the performance of the favoured side than to virtues in the opposition. For one thing, one can hope to remedy one's own defects more easily than one can affect the strengths of the opposition.

11.4.3 Sparta renews war: until the fall of Athens, 414/3–404

In the winter of 414/3 things changed. For 'two main reasons', writes Thucydides, Spartans once more had the psychological strength to resume aggressive war. One of these chief reasons was that now the Athenians were

breaking the treaty of 421, both by plundering Sparta's home territory and also by refusing Sparta's repeated offers of arbitration. Athens was now the oath-breaker, in a way satisfyingly and symmetrically opposite to that of 431 (Thuc. 7.18.3). The reversed situation might lead, through a consistent pattern of divine intervention, to a reversed outcome. The other 'main reason' for Sparta's new aggression was a classic of Spartan secular psychology. Athens was now unusually vulnerable, with huge forces of navy and infantry committed far away in an enduring struggle for the conquest of Syracuse. Sparta in 413 led her alliance once more into Attike. And, after advice from the renegade Athenian politician and general Alkibiades, this time the Spartan forces would not simply go away after a short period of destruction. Instead they set up a permanent base in north Attike, at Dekeleia. From this fort, destruction could be conducted over a far longer period of the year. Athenian farmers could be prevented from working their land. And, as it turned out, more than 20,000 Athenian slaves ran away to what they hoped would be freedom at Dekeleia. Here, in short, was intimate and very damaging economic warfare, which remained in place, sapping Athenian strength, until the city's surrender in 404.

More spectacularly, Sparta also intervened against Athens' forces in Sicily. Had the Athenians defeated Syracuse, the chief city of Sicily, the whole island and much of the western Mediterranean would probably have become part of the Athenian empire, generating sufficient resources of men and money to pose a desperate threat to Sparta. And Athens came very close. Syracuse was almost encircled by an Athenian siege wall, while the sea beyond was already under firm Athenian control. The Syracusans were about to discuss formally in their assembly the idea of surrender. And then came news from Sparta. Help was coming. A small naval force was approaching, under the command of the Spartan Gylippos. Syracuse did not surrender. Instead the Syracusans were encouraged by the thought that 'Gylippos, son of Kleandridas, was coming, sent by the Spartans – as commander' (Thuc. 7.2.1) Sparta's small force was to have an immense effect on the future of Greek history – and very likely on world history. The western Mediterranean would become, centuries later, *mare nostrum*, 'our sea', in the language of the Romans. Never would it become the equivalent in Attic Greek, *hē thalassa hē hēmetera*.

Once in Syracuse, Gylippos directed the local forces according to Spartan techniques. Thucydides shows him waiting for, then exploiting, his *kairoi*, opportunities presented by moments of Athenian weakness. He also repeatedly launched attacks by night, in good Spartan style. In that way he captured the Athenian strongpoint of Plemmyrion in Syracuse harbour, then convinced the Syracusans that the mighty Athenian fleet, the best-reputed in the known world, was weak enough to be attacked by sea. In autumn of 413, Athens lost a final naval battle in Syracuse harbour. Over 200 triremes – more than half the city's navy – were lost in this campaign. At least 40,000 men had

been in the Athenian-led force even in its last weeks. In Thucydides' words, 'few out of many returned home' (7.87.6). Sparta's triumph in the west, achieved largely by Sicilian men and resources, was complete. But Gylippos, Sparta's strategic hero, is not heard of again for a decade – until the episode which caused him to be disgraced and exiled from Sparta for alleged theft of public funds. He too, it may well be, fell victim to the jealousy of the Similars, whose status he had for ever transcended.

Athens, defeated in the west, still had an empire and elements of a navy in the east. Sparta, exploiting the grand *kairos* created by Athens' losses in Sicily, at last set about creating a navy large enough to challenge Athens in the Aegean. Spartans understood that Athens, cut off from her own agricultural lands in Attike, was utterly dependent on grain imported by ship from the Black Sea region. The precious vessels which brought this food passed through the Bosporos and the Hellespont: here were places for Spartan warships to lie in wait, and to challenge the Athenian triremes which escorted the merchantmen. The required strategy for Sparta was clear enough: starve Athens into surrender by cutting off her grain. A cluster of further *kairoi* presented themselves as many of Athens' most important subject-states, emboldened by the empire's losses in Sicily, revolted to join the Spartan side: Khios, Lesbos, Rhodes in 412; in 411 Byzantion (on the Bosporos) and Euboea (itself on the grain route, further south). Warships of the Spartan alliance aided these revolts. But how to finance fleets operating over long periods in the Aegean and beyond?

Naval expenses posed a problem which Sparta never satisfactorily solved. Athens' imperial subjects mostly paid large annual sums in cash, from which a grand navy was funded. In contrast, Sparta's long-standing allies, in or near the Peloponnese, by tradition did not make large regular payments to a central treasury, which would have permitted the expensive business of maintaining ships and paying their crews. Sparta was sensibly reluctant to impose such taxation of her own while the Peloponnesian War still raged. Much of Sparta's appeal to allies, real or potential, was the claim that she was bringing 'freedom to the Greeks': copying Athenian imperial methods of financial exaction would subvert that claim. The alternative way of fundraising posed, however, a similar problem for Sparta. The wealthy Persian empire promised to supply funds for a Spartan navy against Athens. But Persia had its own demands to make: it wanted to resume control of eastern Greek cities which Athens had long been protecting with its navy. For Sparta to 'free the Greeks' by handing large numbers of them over to Persia was a scenario likewise unacceptable to many, Spartans included. Spartan admirals quarrelled openly over the desirability of collaboration with Persia: Lysandros apparently handed back to the Persians large funds, rather than leave them to his successor Kallikratidas, who (unlike Lysandros) expressed distaste at dependence on the 'barbarian' Mede.

Sparta's naval war from 412 to 404, in or close to the Aegean, proved more difficult than expected. Athenian skill was not easily overcome by those whose own traditions lay rather in land fighting. Athens won repeated, large, victories. After one of these, suffered by the fleet of the Spartan admiral Mindaros in 410, the survivors sent the following plaintive message back to Sparta: 'The ships are lost. Mindaros is dead. The men are starving. We don't know what to do.' The fact that this message fell into Athenian hands (whence our knowledge of it: Xen. *Hell.* 1.1.23), only made things worse – by comforting the enemy. In 406 a particularly promising Athenian victory occurred in the eastern Aegean at Arginousai. Here too the Spartan commander (Kallikratidas) perished, seemingly with the bravery for which his people were known. But, while Sparta could – at this period – lose one fleet after another, and still afford to construct further navies thanks to ample Persian funds, for Athens no such reserves were available. In 405, Lysandros with another large fleet moved to challenge the Athenian navy in the Hellespont, the artery of Athens' food. He was slow, however, to accept the Athenians' challenge to join battle in open water. Day after day his ships stayed safe in harbour. Was he feigning, or waiting for a particular *kairos* in familiar Spartan fashion? Spartan tradition afterwards emphasized the victorious role of his soothsayer, Agias. It was, as we have seen, the function of a military soothsayer to advise on the *timing* of those manoeuvres which the generals decided. At the battle of Plataia in 479, Sparta's chief soothsayer Tisamenos – seemingly the grandfather of the Agias who advised Lysandros seventy-four years later – had famously imposed an extraordinary delay before allowing the Spartans to attack the enemy (Hdt. 9.36, 61–2). In view of the fame later enjoyed by Agias among the Spartans, it is quite likely that he took the credit for Sparta's delay in engaging at the Hellespont (Powell (2010) 112–13). Successful delay was apparently in the family tradition; it was also the obvious way for an ambitious diviner to make his mark on events. In any case, that delay proved crucial. Athenian sailors abandoned caution, assuming that Sparta would continue to hold off. Beaching their own ships, and scattering in search of food, they gave the Spartans the ultimate *kairos*. Lysandros led out his fleet and captured almost every ship in the Athenian navy, without a battle, at Aigospotamoi. The grain supply was cut, and in the following year, 404, the city of Athens surrendered to Sparta, from starvation.

11.5 Sparta's Decisions of 404–3: To Annihilate or Spare Athens?

It has been traditional to end at this point the account of Sparta's ultimately victorious warfare of the fifth century, without dwelling for long on its last episode. And yet that episode was decisive for European history, and so for

the history of the wider world. Sparta allowed Athens to survive. The city was thus able in due course to develop and pass on the literary record – and the influence – of Greek civilization to Rome, to the Renaissance, to ourselves and (we trust) to our successors. Without meaning to, the Spartans were preserving knowledge of their own history: most of what we know of ancient Sparta comes from Athenian works produced after 404. But in 404, at the moment of surrender, the prospect for Athens was dark. Athens seemed likely to go the way Miletos had gone ninety years earlier. Miletos, like Athens, had been an extraordinarily productive city, establishing numerous colonies and presiding over the invention of Greek philosophy and other advanced speculative enquiry. Yet, after the Persian capture and wreck of the city in 494, its grand creativity was gone for ever. Almost as a ghost in European history, Miletos survives in reputation because Athens passed on some of its traditions. But what if Athens itself were now to suffer Miletos' fate?

In 404 Athens had no options concerning surrender. Sparta encircled the city on land, in Attike; Sparta controlled the sea. Her forces were now invincible. No food was coming in. Death by starvation for all Athenians could be arranged perfectly easily by Sparta, if she wished. What were Sparta's political options? The range of choices is not pleasant now to review. But the Spartans evidently did have a variety of horrible possibilities in mind – as witness their recent actions towards other conquered groups. So, grim or not, to understand Sparta, and wider history, we too should review them. A clear possibility, present in all minds, was: general massacre of Athens' adult male citizens. This – or mass enslavement – was what the Athenians themselves thought likeliest, according to the contemporary Athenian Xenophon (*Hell.* 2.2.3, 10, 14). Sparta had performed general massacres during recent decades against communities of stubborn opponents: notoriously to the little town of Plataia in 427, and more recently in the eastern Aegean as at Iasos by Lysandros (Diod. Sic. 13.104.7). Lysandros seems to have massacred all 3000 Athenian sailors captured after his victory at Aigospotamoi. Alternatively, the Spartans might have slaughtered those suspected of being the democratic faction in Athens, the core of resistance to Sparta. That too was a policy attributed to Lysandros at the end of the war: Plutarch describes him as conducting a 'massacre of uncounted democrats' in the towns of the former Athenian empire (*Life of Lysandros*, 19.4). Or, the Spartans could do to Athens what Lysandros had reportedly done to another conquered town (Kedreai) near the end of the war: they could enslave the citizen population (Xen. *Hell.* 2.1.15). Alternatively, as a favoured option used several times, they could leave the citizen population alive and in place, but sell the local slaves (e.g. Thuc. 8.41.2, Xen. *Hell.* 1.6.14–15, 2.1.19). Or, most obviously, they could plunder Athens. A long and repeatedly disastrous war had impoverished the city, especially on a public level. But no doubt existing private wealth, not to mention the possible sale into slavery of living people in the city – several tens of thousands, in all probability – offered to raise an

enormous profit as well as satisfying the vindictive urges resulting from decades of war. Such were Sparta's possible courses of punitive and lucrative action towards Athens. Yet she performed none of them. No massacre, no enslavement, no general rape, no sale of existing slaves. Athens was not even systematically plundered, or subjected to financial indemnity, by Sparta. Why?

After the fall of the Athenian empire, victorious Sparta faced a grave financial problem. She had, for a few years, simply far too much money. Thousands of talents, in the form of coin and no doubt other treasure, were officially conveyed to Sparta for the government to count. How much was coming back secretly, in the baggage of officers, was for all Spartans to worry about. Sparta's officially levelling institutions clearly were threatened by the sudden appearance of super-rich individuals. This may be the period from which sprang the invented tradition that the revered founder Lykourgos had outlawed coinage (Hodkinson (2000) 165–7). In any case, we know that the holding of precious metal coinage by Spartan individuals was at this time made illegal. The great Gylippos, eclipsed perhaps but unforgettable after his decisive campaign against Athens in Sicily a decade earlier, was now exiled on a charge of pilfering treasure derived from the Athenian empire. But we can be sure that, amid the fearful arguments against coinage, the main target of suspicion was Lysandros (Powell (2006) 297–9). This is made clear by the treatment of his most senior subordinate, his trusted general Thorax. When this man returned to Sparta, fresh from his victory with Lysandros over the Athenian empire, he was put to death. His offence was, to bring illicit treasure or money back to Sparta. And that surely was why Lysandros had not been allowed to enslave or plunder Athens. Either process might have made Lysandros uniquely rich. And such wealth threatened to give him supreme influence within Sparta.

In 404–3 Lysandros was the Spartan general who dwarfed all others, after his destruction of the Athenian navy at Aigospotamoi. He, like others, was opposed at Sparta precisely because of his success: through jealousy, as we have seen. He, like the victorious Pausanias before him, was suspected of wishing to subvert Sparta's government, to make himself supreme. Far from Sparta, in cities of the newly conquered Athenian empire, Lysandros was able to set up regimes formed of cliques of his local partisans. Outside Athens, these were called 'decarchies' – governments of ten men. Within Athens, Lysandros' local junta of wealthy Athenians were 'The Thirty', a number no doubt chosen to echo Spartan practice (Sparta's supreme judicial *gerousia* was thirty in number). But after a few months of irregular massacres and grand theft by The Thirty, and growing military opposition from exiled Athenian democrats, leading Spartan opponents of Lysandros had had enough. In 403 Sparta chose – belatedly and after deep divisions within its government – to let Athens be ruled once more by the unruly Athenian

democrats. This was the very form of regime which had just given Sparta some seventy years of intense trouble. But democracy, through its sheer numbers, was also the hardest system for Lysandros to manipulate.

Good modern scholars have thought that, in sparing Athens, Sparta was motivated by fear of Thebes: rather than destroy Athens and create a vacuum for nearby Thebes to fill, better to leave Athens in place to check Theban growth, preserving Spartan dominance over central Greece by the principle of divide-and-rule.⁸ True, we know that Thebes in 371 would prove Sparta's nemesis, and Thebes had, even before 404–3, often been troublesome to Sparta. But in 404–3 no living Spartan had ever gone to war against Thebes, whereas Athens had been the great enemy and threat for sixty years. As for restricting Theban power, Athenian democrats in 403 were informally receiving military aid from Thebes, against the Spartan interest. In 404 Thebes had pleaded with Sparta to destroy Athens, but by 403 to destroy Athens had become for Sparta one way of thwarting Thebes. Yet Sparta decided otherwise. Her separate decisions, in 404 and in 403, to spare Athens both arose from calculations where Thebes was marginal. The main reason for Sparta's extraordinary forbearance towards Athenian democrats, towards Athenian wealth, and towards the very survival of the great enemy city, turns out to be – in accordance with Sparta's somewhat formulaic history – the Spartans' own internal quarrels and fears. The future of the Greek world was, for Spartans, rather less important than their ability to live undisturbed in their status, among the unwallled villages of the Eurotas valley.

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NOTES

1 See also [Chapter 1](#).

2 See de Ste.Croix (1972) 176–8.

3 For fuller references to the events in Tables 1–2, see Powell (1980) 89–93.

4 Thuc. 1.61.1 f., 64.2 f., 2. 13.6, 31.1 f., 2.56.2, 58.1, 3.17.4.

5 Gomme (1945) 355 f.

6 See [Chapter 1](#). Among countless references to military use of opportunity, note especially the speaker in Thucydides who reportedly said, in 424, that it was good and customary for a threatened state to begin a war 'if opportunity (*kairos*) presents': 4.92.5. Similar thinking lay behind a

remarkable agreement made in 420 between Sparta and Argos, to settle a dispute by pitched battle between themselves at some future date. The agreement had a caveat: the battle should not take place when either party was distracted by some other war or by plague. Each party thus predicted, and guarded against, aggressive opportunism on the part of the other (Thuc. 5.41.2). More generally on the military use of *kairos* by Greeks, see Powell (1980) and Trédé (1992).

- 7 Thucydides' chronology at this point is notoriously unclear. It is possible that the 700 helot soldiers, mentioned here as sent abroad with Brasidas, were recruited before the 2000 were killed, or indeed as part of the same movement. We may speculate that the authorities said in effect, 'They (the 2000) have already earned their freedom. Here, with Brasidas, will be your chance to join them!' It is even possible that, by marching the Brasideian helots away visibly, reassuringly armed and in due order, Sparta created cover for the absence of the much larger group, the 2000 who were taken away to a different fate. To the inevitable awkward questions about the latter, Spartans might have responded, 'Where are the 2000? Oh, they marched off like the Brasideians, to ... [some other campaign].'
- 8 The argument is well made at Cartledge (1987) 275–80.

CHAPTER 12

The Empire of the Spartans (404–371)

Françoise Ruzé

(Translated by Anton Powell)

In the aftermath of their victory over Athens, to the Spartans everything must have seemed possible. They had neutralized their enemy's naval power. They had taken over Athens' role as 'protector' of the Greek cities of the Aegean and of Asia Minor. They had successfully negotiated with the representatives of Persian power in Asia. And they could look forward to their hegemony being accepted in the cities of Greece. With hindsight, we can see that these various prospects collapsed from the time of Sparta's naval defeat off Knidos in 394 – in spite of the reversal which followed the Peace of Antalkidas in 386. It would take, however, more than twenty years from the time of Knidos for Sparta's failure to become definitive with the defeat at Leuktra in 371 and the subsequent invasion of Laconia by the victorious forces of Thebes, and with the loss of Messenia in 369. It would be even longer before the Spartans themselves accepted that their losses were irreversible.

For Sparta as for many others, internal and external problems were intimately linked. Were the fruits of victory over Athens to belong exclusively to the Spartiates, with neither their allies nor the other, less privileged, men of Laconia allowed a share? For the first time in Greek history a single power was in a position to dominate both by land and sea: should Sparta exploit that position and act as an imperial power? If so, should the chosen method be alliance or outright dictation, and with what resources? On these questions clashed powerful personalities such as Lysandros and the kings Pausanias and Agesilaos, but also leaders of lesser rank who would often pay the price for their city's moments of indecision. The general picture is of a Sparta which misses the chance to overhaul its social structures, fails to impose a coherent policy as regards Asia Minor, and in mainland Greece makes the mistake of allowing Agesilaos to dominate policy. That king gives the impression of being obsessed with the military might of his city and with a hatred of any who resisted it, especially the Thebans. Sparta seems to have underestimated the power of the Greek cities. She thought they could be ruled by individual Spartan governors, harmosts, or by local partisans. The hatred this policy generated would prove so powerful that it swept aside the fear and dissension which might have been expected to keep Sparta's subjects in a state of submission.

In our literary sources for this period of over thirty years, whether pro-Spartan

or not, we see the beginnings of what would become an elaborate myth – of Sparta’s bygone glory. An essential source is Xenophon’s *Hellenika*. Essential in spite of its various omissions and distortions, made to protect the reputations of Sparta and of king Agesilaos, a personal friend of Xenophon,¹ and sometimes also to favour the image of Athens, Xenophon’s native city. Since his interest is almost exclusively confined to Sparta’s land power, Xenophon sees little that is distinctive in the period under review. He tends to dismiss criticism of Sparta as slander, and quite likely as corruptly motivated.² The same author’s *Lakedaimonion Politeia* (‘*Lak.Pol.*’ in what follows) was probably written between 394 and 371. It serves as a *terminus post quem*: aspects of Spartan government which conflict with the picture presented by this text were probably introduced after it was written. Indeed, its famous [chapter 14](#) mentions changes under way which were, according to the author, endangering the traditional laws and practices of the city.³ Much recent scholarship has had the aim of revaluing Xenophon: it has claimed to identify numerous ways in which his eulogies of Sparta and Agesilaos are in fact less than wholehearted and to emphasize critiques by Xenophon of Sparta’s imperial conduct. On the whole, such claims seem correct but, by comparing Xenophon with other sources, albeit fragmentary, we see that his work stands in frequent need of correction. The anonymous author of the *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia* (henceforth ‘*HO*’), no admirer of Sparta, gives us a better understanding of why some cities in the 390s were so hostile to the Spartans,⁴ and gives greater credibility to the account of the period by Diodorus Siculus – a writer who drew largely on the near-contemporary (and far from pro-Spartan) Ephoros of Kyme (405–330 BC; Jacoby, *FGrH* 70). Theopompos of Chios (378/7–post 320 BC; *FGrH* 115), who was particularly interested in Asia, also complements Xenophon’s account. Together, these various writers allow us to identify how far the information in Plutarch’s relevant Lives, those of Lysandros, of Agesilaos and of Artaxerxes, may amount to ideological reconstruction.

12.1 The Zenith of Spartan Power: 404–394

Xenophon seems to express a majority view when he writes that, in the years following their victory over the Athenian empire in 404, the Spartans became ‘the masters, on land as on sea’; that they ‘command the whole of Greece’; that many cities came under their control, ‘in which the Lakedaimonians, and any Lakedaimonian individual, can do whatever they want’ (*Anabasis* 6.6.12). According to Strabo (8.5.5), Ephoros, not a laconophile, wrote that Laonians ‘so far surpassed the rest that they alone of the Greeks ruled over both land and sea’. However, the defeat of their navy at Knidos in 394 put an end to the Spartans’ claim to authority at sea. On the mainland too things got worse for

Sparta, in spite of her retrieving formal hegemony thanks to the ‘King’s Peace’, negotiated by the Spartiate Antalkidas in 386. This treaty effectively guaranteed to lend Sparta the financial and naval help of the King of Persia, so as to impose in Greece the ‘autonomy’ of its cities (*Hell.* 5.1.31; Diod. Sic. 14.110). It is worth asking why Sparta allowed herself to become entangled in a form of relationship with other Greek cities which she did not have the means to sustain, and whether the conservatism within Sparta, so often considered as the reason for her failures abroad, was as thorough as is commonly thought.

Let us briefly survey the situation in which Sparta found herself immediately after the defeat of the Athenian empire. Athens was condemned to lose most of its defences, its fleet and its Long Walls between the city and its port, Peiraieus. But the city was not destroyed. And its conqueror, Lysandros, was obliged to watch as king Pausanias brought about a reconciliation between rival Athenian factions (see Powell, this volume, [Chapter 11](#)). In Athens as elsewhere, Lysandros had imposed a regime of diehard Spartophiles; at Athens these numbered thirty, whereas in other cities the normal number was ten, a ‘dekarchy’. Over them in each city stood a Spartan harmost in command of a garrison. The successes achieved by Lysandros made him the best-reputed of all those Spartiates who spent months or years on official business abroad, and who were compelled – sometimes to their own cost – to take initiatives without referring them first to the home authorities, the magistrates or the assembly. For such men, to merge back into normal life at home was not always easy. And this elite of expatriate commanders, who while abroad had experienced a very different kind of life, were no doubt commonly viewed with suspicion or resentment in Sparta itself. The riches they had acquired overseas will have aroused jealousy among those who had, themselves, also answered the city’s call to military service but who had not profited in material terms by doing so. Additionally, Sparta was troubled by major changes in society: large losses in citizen manpower; growing use of men from the non-Spartiate classes – above all, of helots who, once promoted to trusted roles, could never again be relegated to their former humble position; and the recourse to mercenary soldiers, something which was always very expensive.

Sparta’s external relations had also changed profoundly. Henceforward the Spartans have to take on the role of protecting the Greeks of Asia Minor from the power of the Great King of Persia. Now, Sparta had already needed to form an alliance with the King, notably with prince Cyrus, the King’s representative in Asia Minor. From 407, Lysandros enjoyed excellent relations with the prince. When Kallikratidas initially succeeded Lysandros as admiral-in-chief (*nauarchos*), these relations suffered, briefly. But Persia continued to meet a large part of the cost of Sparta’s naval war against Athens. Why should Persia continue such funding once Athens was humbled?

Sparta did not have the resources to pay for the running of a fleet, unless she demanded money and personal service from Greek cities allied to her.

Finally, the Lakedaimonians had won their war against Athens with the aid of their allies from mainland Greece who, in the main, had done what was required of them, by supplying troops, money, or both. But some of these allies, such as Elis and Mantinea, had proved less than reliable; others, Corinth and Thebes, now felt excluded from the fruits of victory, with Sparta seeming to consider herself solely responsible for that success.

Even at its start, then, the period of peace beginning in 404 may seem unlikely to leave Sparta in quiet enjoyment of her gains. Problems at home and abroad, in mainland Greece and in Asia Minor, impacted on each other and complicated matters. For the sake of clarity, however, we shall approach each of them separately.

12.1.1 Tensions within the Spartan state

The personality of Lysandros was ill-suited to the restraints which Spartan rules put upon individuals. The state had allowed him to conduct in Asia Minor a policy of his own making, and his success there made it impossible for Sparta to remove him. The extravagant eulogies which some cities, such as Samos, bestowed upon him looked dangerously like a form of worship. The navarchs' monument at Delphi, which showed Lysandros in victorious pose being crowned by Poseidon while he in turn crowned his own city, was unparalleled in its genre.⁵ After such a career, Lysandros could hardly be expected to give up quietly his own political schemes and to subordinate himself to Sparta's hereditary kings. We are not surprised to learn that he was accused, after his death, of having plotted to reform the kingship, and to make the office subject to election from among those of Heraklid descent or from among all citizens according to most sources (Diod. Sic. 14.13.8; Plut., *Lys.*, 24.5; 30.3; *Ages.* 8.3); and even Aristotle (*Polit.* 5.1.1301b19–20) thinks he wanted the abolition of kingship (cf. Bommelaer (1981) 224).

The conflict between Lysandros and king Pausanias raises general questions about Sparta's conduct of her new hegemony. How stable was Spartan policy? How great were the differences which might arise from the fact that the ruling college of ephors changed its five members every year? In 403, Sparta had first sent into Attike an army of Peloponnesian mercenaries under the command of Lysandros, to tackle the rebellious Athenian democratic faction which had captured Peiraieus and which was threatening the pro-Spartan regime of the Thirty in Attike (*Hell* 2.4.28). But then a second expedition is sent from Sparta, on the heels of the first, this time made up of Lakedaimonians and Peloponnesian allies. Its commander, king Pausanias, is given general power over both the first and the second expeditionary forces.

We cannot tell whether Pausanias' action in promoting a reconciliation between warring Athenian factions was compatible with the instructions he had received from the home authorities. Did the latter consider that giving power back to the democrats of Athens, as Pausanias did, was a price worth paying to end the Athenian civil war? It is certain that the king had the support of at least one of the ephors who accompanied the expedition, Nausikleidas. When Pausanias returned to Sparta he was put on trial for his conduct of the expedition, but the fact that he was acquitted shows that Lysandros' far more aggressive policy towards Athens and its democrats was being decisively rejected; we hear that it was the ephors who swung the vote in the king's favour.⁶ They evidently shared Pausanias' fear that a more aggressive policy might cause Sparta 'to lose its reputation among the Greeks' (Diod. Sic.14.33.6). It need not be the case that some Spartans rejected the principle of imperialism, as certain historians have argued.⁷ What Spartans may have rejected was the reliance in each city on a small group of local pro-Spartan partisans whose behaviour provoked determined opposition and who were protected by a Spartan harmost and garrison. Initially a less rigid form of imperialism seems to have won the day at Sparta: Lysandros' dekharchies were abolished – although the garrisons were not. Later, however, the Spartans find themselves involved in a series of external wars which cause them first to impose a more severe policy, and then to lose their hegemony. We lack evidence to reconstruct the debates at Sparta as to why the city should engage in these wars.

The debate which took place at Sparta over the use of coinage was connected with the issue of imperialism. But it also raised the whole question of the Lakedaimonian economy and of how land ownership related to political power; and touches on what Hodkinson has called 'the alleged rhetra of Epitadeus'.⁸ The debate seems to have initiated in a squalid, and frankly dubious, affair which was nevertheless much exploited for political ends. We read that Gylippos, the Spartan commander who had vanquished the Athenian expedition in Sicily, had subsequently gone to Asia Minor with Lysandros and had been given by him the responsibility of bringing some of the spoils of war back to Sparta – probably at, or after, the end of 405. According to the story, Gylippos had given in to temptation and helped himself to some of the money in each bag, unaware that every bag contained a token (*skytalē*) indicating the sum it should contain.⁹ When he realised the danger he was in, Gylippos fled Sparta, which gave free rein to condemnatory opinions even without a formal trial. This obscure affair was exploited by those Spartans who felt that distant adventures had left some of their fellow-citizens with too lively a taste for wealth, that the various foreign coins in circulation were to blame, and that men's minds were being corrupted. While Lysandros was absent from Sparta (perhaps at Athens, and perhaps in the autumn of 404), but after he had sent back the rest of the booty from the captured Athenian empire, Spartans debated whether this was a good moment to strike a coinage of their own.

Plutarch (*Lys.* 17) reports, on the authority of Ephoros and Theopompos, that ‘the most sensible (*phronimōtatoi*) of the Spartans’ asked the ephors to ‘purify’ Sparta of this gold and silver which was, to the highest degree, an imported ‘calamity’ (*kēra*). ‘The ephors made a proposal that coinage of gold and silver should not be allowed on Spartan territory, and that the traditional currency should be used instead.’ But following argument from friends of Lysandros, that it was in the city’s interest to keep the money he had sent back, ‘it was decided to allow in this money, for the public treasury, but that if an individual were caught in possession of any, he would be sentenced to death’. In early 403 or later, a spectacular example was made of Thorax, put to death under this rule in spite of his having been a friend of Lysandros, a commander under him, and indeed Lysandros’ appointee as harmost of Samos, a key state for control of the eastern Aegean.¹⁰

This was no doubt the moment which gave rise to the myth, reported by Xenophon (*Lak. Pol.* 7.4–6), that Lykourgos, Sparta’s legendary lawgiver, had banned the use of gold and silver at Sparta. Actually, there is various evidence to show that foreign coinage had been used at Sparta in the fifth century, whereas there is very little evidence for the so-called traditional iron currency of Sparta, which could only have served as a token currency for use strictly within the Spartan state.¹¹ Now, Sparta’s hegemony required money. Soldiers – other than Sparta’s own citizens or those sent by allied cities – had to be paid. Distant expeditions, a fleet and all its equipment, diplomacy: such things required finance and a well-adapted form of finance at that. Cash deposited in the city’s treasury, derived from spoils of war, fines and tribute, would not have been easy to handle: why not melt down this precious metal and strike the city’s own coinage? Admittedly, future sources of metal for such coinage were uncertain. Sparta had no source, no mine, of precious metal within her own territory; her capacity to issue coinage of gold or silver would always depend on what she could acquire abroad. As Polybios would observe, two and a half centuries later:

when they started to send out naval expeditions, and to campaign with infantry outside the Peloponnese, clearly they could no longer get what they needed with their iron money or by bartering the products of their harvest, as the laws of Lykourgos demanded. Their policies now required a common currency and supplies from foreign sources. From now on they had no choice but to pay court to the Persians, to demand tribute from the islanders and to extract money from the rest of the Greeks. They realised that exercising hegemony over Greece, or indeed making any political change, was incompatible with the laws of Lykourgos.

(6.49.8–10)

The decision Sparta made in 404 had further implications. It might not be entirely unreasonable to refuse to issue a Spartan coinage, but Sparta was also

refusing to use *any* coinage, either for transactions between Lakedaimonians or with outsiders, for paying salaries or other forms of reward to people within Spartan territory. Now, to serve in military campaigns and notably those conducted overseas, Sparta was calling on all Lakedaimonians, including former Spartiates now relegated to a lower status, *perioikoi* and liberated helots. Were such people not to be offered payment in cash? The law of 404 enshrined the victory of large landowners. However deserving soldiers might be, they would evidently never be acknowledged as full citizens unless they owned sufficient land: portable wealth in the form of cash was utterly rejected.¹² Many Spartans who had not had the chance to enrich themselves while serving abroad, because kept at home to defend their own city, patiently endured a reduction in their own status, through shortage of funds.¹³ There was evidently a certain conservative consensus, a refusal to make any change which would disturb the link between citizenship and land ownership.

To this period, probably to the start of the fourth century, belongs – if that is the word – the law supposedly passed on the motion of an ephor, Epitadeus.¹⁴ The only testimony to its existence is Plutarch (*Agis* 5.3–5), who does not name his own source: ‘Epitadeus was author of a *rhētra* which allowed [a citizen] to give his inheritance and his allotment of land (*oikos kai klēros*) to anyone he chose, whether in his own lifetime or in his will ... Powerful people then began to acquire land unscrupulously, to the exclusion of legitimate heirs. Wealth rapidly became concentrated in a few hands.’ Scholars have provided abundant reasons why this evidence cannot be accepted as it stands. For one thing, it conflicts with what we know from other sources about the transfer of wealth. Also Aristotle, later in the fourth century, represents the worsening inequalities in wealth as the result of a long process involving transmission of property by women. He blames ‘the legislator’, in other words a law of very long standing: ‘the fact is that some have come to possess immense fortunes, while others own only a tiny amount. And land has fallen into a very few hands. Here too bad legislative arrangements are to blame. The legislator did indeed disapprove of buying or selling one’s land (*chōra*), and he was right. But he left people free to give it away, or to bequeath it, as they wished – which inevitably comes to the same thing.’ (*Pol.* 2. 1270 a 16–22) It has been suggested by Avramovic (2005) that the new law in question removed the upper limit to gifts or bequests, notably by including the *oikos* and the *klēros*. I myself believe that as a polarization of wealth developed, apparently around the end of the fifth century, it led increasing numbers of citizens to take out loans which were eventually discharged, where cash was lacking, by the transfer of real estate – to the detriment of citizens of modest means. The role played in this process by wealth acquired in ventures overseas is hard to detect in detail, because wealth brought back to Sparta could hardly be referred to on the record, but it is possible that the system of transmission of property had now reached its limits. The alleged law of Epitadeus was perhaps no more than official recognition of the fact that

many 'gifts' and 'bequests' were in reality the repayment of loans.

In any case, at the start of the fourth century, the population of Sparta contained a growing number of men who were free but of a status inferior to that of the Spartan full-citizen, the *homoioi*. Thanks to these men Sparta had won its war, and now hoped to keep the hegemony it had acquired over distant cities. There were ex-*homoioi*, degraded for reasons of poverty, ex-helots (*neodamōdeis*), freed in order to fight as hoplites, not to mention the *perioikoi* kept far from their homes by long campaigns. How long could Sparta continue to treat as inferiors this population to which the defence of the city was entrusted? The question was posed acutely by the conspiracy of Kinadon. According to Xenophon (*Hell.* 3.3.4–11), in the year that Agesilaos became king (399/8) the ephors received reports of a revolutionary plot organized by a certain Kinadon, and 'the whole mass of helots, *neodamōdeis*, Inferiors and *perioikoi* share complicity with its leaders'. Numerous, armed (with weapons of war or agricultural tools), they were united in hatred of the *homoioi* and they knew how to fight. The ephors recognized the danger and organized a rapid, effective response. Kinadon was sent on a mission to Aulon, a perioikic community of north-western Messenia, in command of a troop of *hippeis*, that is, of elite young citizens whose role included the defence of the homeland. Now their job is to arrest Kinadon on the journey, far from his fellow conspirators. Once arrested, he names the other leaders; they too are arrested, tortured and (though Xenophon is not explicit) no doubt put to death. This affair is all the more revealing in that Xenophon narrates it without comment. It underlines the dramatic imbalance between the number of full citizens and the rest of the population: 'in the *agora*' the ratio was reportedly 1:100. Many of the latter were in the service of the Spartan state – Kinadon himself, for one. The fact that he was put in command of *hippeis* suggests that he himself had once belonged to that body in his youth, before being relegated from the citizen body by reason of poverty.¹⁵ This would explain the proud expression with which he reportedly explained his conspiracy: he had acted 'so as not to be at Sparta anyone's inferior'. What a world of frustration that phrase suggests, in a society where having the necessary wealth to contribute to the *syssition* had become 'the touchstone of citizenship' (Ar. *Pol.* 1271a 36–7). However, no social revolution would weld together the various malcontents whose only shared feature was 'hatred' for the Spartiates, and whose only dream was to transfer the latter's privileges to themselves. And in this case the system had reacted with speed and efficiency, and thus effectively avoided having to confront the economic problem which was undermining the solidarity and balance of the citizen body.

12.1.2 The pursuit of an Asian policy

Remarkably, this nervous reluctance of the Spartiates to confront their own social and economic problems at home is accompanied by the pursuit of an adventurous forward policy in Asia Minor.¹⁶ We have to wonder how far this is the influence of Lysandros at work, how Sparta saw its relations with allied cities, with the Persians – and what king Agesilaos' operations in Asia really amounted to.

Lysandros was known as the winner of several battles, and the power which Sparta enjoyed over cities of the Aegean and Asia Minor was in many cases his personal power. He had managed to win the support of the elite in various cities, as well as the friendship of the Persian prince Cyrus, whom the Great King Darius II had put in charge of Asia Minor. Lysandros had been recalled to Sparta in 403, following a complaint by Pharnabazos, the Persian satrap of Hellespontine Phrygia, whose lands he had been ravaging. The dekarchies which Lysandros had set up seem to have been suppressed at this point, but it is difficult to tell whether this amounted to an abandonment of the Asiatic Greeks by Sparta, or just a change of tactics. For the Spartans, to maintain a large army overseas would require their Greek allies in the area to trust and collaborate with them, now that Persia no longer needed Sparta to neutralize the power of Athens. Our texts give us no picture of how Sparta saw the future of her involvement in Asia. We may get the impression that Sparta found herself committed in the region almost without realizing it, once prince Cyrus had asked for Spartan military aid as he challenged his brother Artaxerxes II for the throne of the Persian empire, after the death of Darius II in 405/4.

Sparta's decision, made in 402, to support Cyrus' revolt 'covertly and rather insubstantially' (Cartledge (1987) 352), was partly done in a spirit of reciprocity. Without Cyrus' earlier financial help to Sparta, victory over Athens could hardly have been won in the way it was, and Sparta's foothold in Asia Minor would have been desperately insecure. But Sparta's confidence in Cyrus must also reflect the will of Lysandros, and the thought that if Cyrus were to succeed in dethroning his brother, Sparta would have a serious chance of establishing a permanent protectorate over the Greek cities of Asia Minor. It was undoubtedly the home authorities of Sparta (the ephors: *Hell.* 3.1.1) who ordered the high admiral Samios to put his fleet at Cyrus' disposal, but, on the other hand, the Spartan Klearchos must have been acting on his own initiative when he set out to serve Cyrus by recruiting mercenaries.¹⁷ Now in exile, he had been harrased by Byzantion, but it had needed a Spartan army to dislodge him from that post for disobeying the ephors (Diod. Sic.14.12).

In 401 Cyrus was killed in battle against the royal troops at Cunaxa, north of Babylon. Those Spartans who had been with him returned to Asia Minor. The satrap Tissaphernes was now in control of most of that territory. He was a determined opponent of Sparta and a believer in the absolute authority of the Great King – and thus of himself – over the Greek cities of Asia. The position

of the latter had been made more delicate by the fact that many of them, or at least of their leaders, had supported Cyrus' revolt. The Greeks in these cities now took refuge behind their walls and sent an appeal for help to the only power in a position to help them: Sparta. Tissaphernes meanwhile laid siege to the Greek city of Kyme. Sparta had been partly responsible for the confidence placed in Cyrus' cause, and for Tissaphernes' hostility. Also, as the state which claimed to be replacing Athens as *hēgemōn* (Diod. Sic. 14.10.1; Polybios 1.2.3), Sparta had promised to protect the Greeks against Persian power, if the latter became too demanding and threatening (Diod. Sic. 14.35.6; cf. *Hell.* 3.1.3). Lysandros may well have seized the chance to press for Sparta to intervene.

The Spartan military missions under Thibron and Derkylidas between 400 and 397 achieved little, so far as we can tell.¹⁸ Late in 400 Thibron was sent as harmost in Western Asia, with 1000 *neodamōdeis*, 4000 Peloponnesians and 300 Athenian cavalry (*Hell.* 3.1.4). In Asia itself he raised troops in the Greek cities and in 399 took over some of Cyrus' former mercenaries, who would prove indisciplined. He was greatly hampered by shortage of cavalry and siege engines. He did enjoy some success, at Magnesia and in the southern Aeolid, but had to limit himself mainly to small-scale operations which ended in the illicit pillaging of allied states. The latter complained to the authorities at Sparta; Thibron as a result was recalled and sentenced to exile.

His successor in command, Derkylidas, had prior experience of Asia. More intelligent than Thibron, he respected allied interests and managed to impose his authority on a heterogeneous army with a taste for pillage. His aim was to exploit divisions between Tissaphernes and the satrap of Hellespontine Phrygia, Pharnabazos. He conducted several successful operations on the fringes of the territory which Pharnabazos controlled, and then, with the latter's agreement, against Bithynia. (For a map of the Greek world at the time of Sparta's empire, see Frontispiece Map 1.) His aims were, to keep his soldiers occupied, to weld them into a fighting force and to find the wherewithal to feed them without troubling his allies. But he did not take a decision to challenge Tissaphernes in Caria, to the south. Instead, he chose to go north of the Hellespont, to protect the Greeks of the Thracian Chersonese by building a wall across their peninsula. He also mounted a siege for seven months to dislodge the Chian exiles from Atarneus, and to create a base there (early 397). While his presence in the region did give the local Greeks some protection against Persian attacks, that protection was hardly reliable and the communities in question communicated their fears to Sparta. When, after twice being ordered to do so by the ephors, Derkylidas did eventually decide to confront the Persians on a grand scale, deploying a fleet in support along the coast, Tissaphernes and Pharnabazos overcame their differences and presented a force far superior to Derkylidas', with a particularly efficient cavalry arm. The two satraps offered a truce, which Derkylidas said he would

accept 'on condition that the Great King leaves the Greek cities autonomous'. To this the Persians acceded, 'on condition that the Greek army leaves the country and the Lakedaimonian harmosts leave the cities' (*Hell.* 3.2.20). Meanwhile each party was to refer the matter to its home authorities.

The general instructions which Sparta had given to these two successive commanders were, to protect the Greek cities from Persian threats in the short term, and for the longer term to force Tissaphernes to recognize the autonomy of these cities – something which did not exclude the possibility of paying tribute to the King. But, though their level of competence was very different, Thibron and Derkylidas had in common that neither was willing, on his own initiative, to attack the satrap on his home ground, in Caria. Three times the ephors sent an order to do so. In 398 they even sent commissioners to make Derkylidas comply, but even then he waited until the order was sent again before he began to move. This reluctance to confront the satrap suggests that the two Spartan generals were aware of their enemy's superiority, and perhaps also that they hesitated to risk a defeat which would be disastrous for the Greek cities. No one on the Spartan side seems to have been aware that Persia, behind her apparent inactivity, was making large-scale preparations against them. In particular a major fleet was being assembled in Phoenicia and on Cyprus, which would be commanded by Konon, an Athenian general who had escaped from the débâcle at Aigospotamoi. According to Xenophon, it was through a Syracusan trader that news of all this first came. He had witnessed in Phoenicia the preparations that were afoot and had then made a special trip to Sparta, the old ally of his own city, to warn the authorities of the approaching threat. An expedition was decided on,¹⁹ with king Agesilaos as its commander. Lysandros was to accompany him; presumably he too played a significant part in the decision.

This expedition (in 396) is represented as highly ambitious, in particular by Xenophon, but in reality it changed little.²⁰ In spite of disagreements between our sources, the overall outline is clear. The king set out with 2000 *neodamōdeis* and 6000 (or 10,000?) allies. But Corinth, Thebes and Athens refused to take part. Agesilaos had a staff of 30 Spartan advisers, *symbouloi*, including Lysandros. These men would be entrusted with missions and with military command, and would be replaced after one year's service.

Both men were enthusiastic for the venture: Agesilaos, newly made king (and now aged forty-eight), was eager to make his mark, while Lysandros was happy to be campaigning aggressively again in Asia, no doubt convinced that he would be the king's most influential adviser. But the expedition set off amid confusion. Agesilaos advertised himself as the heir of Agamemnon setting out against Troy, and so chose to take ship at Aulis in Boiotia, where the sacrifice of Iphigeneia had made it possible for the Achaians of old to make their voyage. But the sacrifice which Agesilaos made now was deliberately wrecked by the Boiotians, who snatched the victims from the

altar and forced the king to leave their territory. Agesilaos had the humiliation of being obliged instead to assemble his forces at Cape Geraistos (in southern Euboeia), before setting sail for Ephesos.

From the varied ancient accounts we can make out some broad lines of the two-year campaign. Sparta's policy towards the Greek cities lacked definition. Sparta had decided earlier to suppress the dekarchies which Lysandros had set up, very likely from personal enmity and mistrust of the role he proposed to play. But we have seen already that some, such as king Pausanias apparently, rejected the principle of dekarchy because they had a different idea of how to conduct a hegemony: by allowing the cities to keep control of their own internal affairs, the risk of revolt would be reduced and the cost in garrison troops would be avoided. According to Xenophon, the state of affairs within the cities of Asia was chaotic: there was neither dekarchy nor democracy nor indeed any stable, reliable system of government. In vain might Lysandros pose as the man who could restore order: he was so besieged by the attentions of his former protégés that Agesilaos took offence and sent him away, on a mission to the Hellespont.

With the satrap of the area, first Tissaphernes then Tithraustes, the Spartans' relations amounted to a long campaign of deception on both sides. Two truces were agreed upon: Agesilaos demanded the autonomy of the Greek cities, and the satrap demanded that the cities pay tribute to the Great King. Each announces that he is referring the matter to his home authorities, and in the meanwhile each prepares for war. Tissaphernes plays for time, to build a fleet and to extricate the fleet blocked in Kaunos (in Caria) by the Spartan high admiral Pharak. Agesilaos meanwhile, like his predecessors, hesitates to intervene in Caria. Xenophon writes of manoeuvres made to mislead Tissaphernes, but 396 was mainly spent in plundering Pharnabazos' territory of Phrygia, where an indecisive battle took place near Daskyleion. Agesilaos concentrated troops and military workshops at Ephesos with great show, and created a cavalry force which would be necessary to achieve true victories: this was to prepare for what was meant to be the grand offensive, up the Maeander valley as far as Sardis. The area was ravaged and plundered; after a period of mixed fortunes the Spartans at last achieved victory at the 'battle of Paktolos' in the spring of 395. This allowed the Greeks to capture and plunder Tissaphernes' camp near Sardis; magnificent booty resulted. But no attempt was made to capture Sardis itself, and Agesilaos departed, to plunder Phrygia and elsewhere. Thus nothing serious was achieved, although Tissaphernes was put to death on the Great King's order, for failing to defend his troops and his camp. He was replaced by Tithraustes, with whom the Spartan force made a truce to last for six months.

As the threat to Spartan interests in the east increased, notably with an uprising against Sparta in Rhodes,²¹ Agesilaos was given increased powers. He was now appointed supreme commander on sea as well as on land. But he

made a serious mistake, as all our sources agree, by appointing his own brother-in-law, Peisandros, as head of the navy, an energetic and brave man but lacking in experience. Agesilaos himself seems to have been unaware of the worsening situation: in addition to supporting Konon's operations in the south, the satrap Tithraustes was working to deepen the hostility felt towards Spartan hegemony within the Greek cities of Asia. Now, during the autumn of 395 and all the winter which followed, Agesilaos, in the north, was conducting campaigns in Mysia and Phrygia. These did not go beyond pillaging, since he was obliged to give up his plans to occupy various strongpoints, but they caused considerable alienation in the areas affected. A temporary alliance with Spithridates, a high-born Persian who had broken with his chief, Pharnabazos, and an understanding with Otys of Paphlagonia, allowed him to set up winter quarters near Daskyleion, at the expense of Pharnabazos with whom he made eventually a formal agreement. According to Xenophon, Agesilaos would have been convinced that by attacking inland Asia Minor he could cause Persia's subjects there to revolt; he is even said to have hoped to 'capture the Great King' (*Hell.* 3.5.1), an ambition made impossible only by his recall to mainland Greece. The enduring illusion that the King of Persia was weak,²² was a main reason why these campaigns in Asia Minor proved a complete failure. Agesilaos could not remain permanently inland, far from the coast; he was deluded in thinking that he could detach from Persian control the leaders of inland peoples who knew the risks of eventual Persian reprisals. Moreover, Xenophon shows the Spartan king receiving from Pharnabazos an unforgettable lesson in loyalty to his sovereign: the Satrap refused to betray Artaxerxes II and to rejoin Agesilaos so long as he was maintained in his post by the King (*Hell.* 4.1.37; cf. Briant (1996) 663). Admittedly, Agesilaos succeeded in ravaging the countryside, and showed that it was fairly easy to reach Sardis. But when he had to leave Asia Minor, the Greek cities there were no safer than they had been before. And he had demonstrated that defeating the Persians was impossible. Had he at least strengthened Sparta's authority over the Greek cities of Asia? Xenophon would have liked to think so: he claims that 'the allies' decided by a vote to accompany Agesilaos to mainland Greece – but he goes on to add that in the event most of the soldiers preferred to stay at home rather than to go and fight other Greeks. Some soldiers, however, were supplied to him by the Greek cities of Asia, soldiers who accompanied him and enabled him to win in 394 the battle of Koroneia in Boiotia, against the allied enemies of Sparta. But this could hardly compensate for the disaster which befell Sparta while Agesilaos was on his journey home, and which the pro-Spartan Xenophon passes over very quickly: the Spartan fleet had been defeated, its ships destroyed or captured, at Knidos by Pharnabazos and Konon (Diod. Sic. 14.83.4–7). And that was the end of Sparta's hegemony at sea.

12.1.3 Difficulties with Sparta's allies in mainland Greece and the outbreak of the Corinthian War

Another main element in the decline of Sparta's hegemony was the Corinthian War. In the aftermath of her victory over Athens, Sparta did not try to create a vast alliance among Greek states, with herself as *hēgemōn*. Thus there was no larger version of the Peloponnesian League brought into being, which would have required a respect for the autonomy of member states and a due recognition of the contribution each had made to the victory. King Pausanias, it seems, had realized the danger which out-and-out imperialism would involve for his city and its traditions; he never showed much enthusiasm for making war on his neighbours. In contrast, the blindness of the Spartans, under the influence of Lysandros, Agis and Agesilaos, has been denounced from the fourth century onwards, even by Xenophon and in spite of his reluctance to criticize Agesilaos, his revered friend.

12.1.4 The war against Elis

The first recalcitrant state against which Sparta took action was also the weakest: Elis. The grounds for dispute went back a long way, to 421, when Sparta had forbidden Eleans to keep control of the city of Lepreon which had been in some sense tributary to them.²³ From that point Elis no longer considered itself an ally of Sparta. In 420 the Eleans excluded Sparta from the sanctuary of Olympia, and thus from the Olympic Games of that year. Later, the Spartan king Agis suffered the personal humiliation of being forbidden by Elis to consult Olympian Zeus – probably at some time in the period 413–404, when Agis was conducting the 'Dekeleian War' within Attike. This of course was intolerable, for a king who wished to strengthen Sparta's authority over its neighbours and to impose a Spartan hegemony over Greece in general. But the official reason given for action against Elis was that the Eleans had to give up control over their state's *perioikoi*, in particular the residents of Triphylia and Akroteria, and that it was Sparta's duty to 'bring them to their senses', which in practice probably meant to install an aristocratic regime.

In the period 401–398 (or possibly 402–399), three campaigns were mounted against Elis. The first two were commanded by Agis, the last by Pausanias – if Diodorus is correct (14.17.6), Agis having died when returning from Delphi where he had dedicated a tithe of Sparta's booty. The first campaign consisted of an intensive pillaging of Elean territory – before an earthquake caused the invading army to withdraw. The Eleans, for their part, looked around for allies; Corinth and Thebes promised them not to join Sparta in this war. In the following year, a second Spartan campaign – this time with allies who included the Athenians – wrecked and plundered Elean territory (Xenophon

wrote exultantly that ‘this campaign was like a stocking-up for the Peloponnese’, *Hell.* 3.2.26). Triphylia was ‘liberated’, and pillaging was conducted close to the city of Elis and also as far as Kyllene on the coast, but the city of Elis was not captured, and an attempt at an oligarchic coup, probably made with the collusion of king Agis, was a disastrous failure. The Spartan army withdrew, leaving behind a harmost and a garrison to spend the winter at Epitalion, which controlled a ford across the river Alpheios. Raids during the winter continued the process of ravaging, and this seems to have been one reason why the Eleans now agreed to negotiate. Schepens (2004b) has argued for the following sequence: a first, unsuccessful, set of negotiations in which the Eleans refused to give up Epeion, and a subsequent invasion by Pausanias who, after besieging but failing to capture the city of Elis, set up winter quarters at Dyme. In any case, in the spring of 398 the Eleans capitulated: they gave up control of their *perioikis*, including Triphylia, gave up their fleet and demolished their city walls. But they kept their political autonomy and their democratic constitution. They also kept the right to administer the sanctuary of Olympia. It is tempting to see the hand of Pausanias behind these Spartan concessions. From now on, and down to 371, Elis behaved as a faithful ally of Sparta.

On other Spartan operations in mainland Greece our evidence is scarce. Probably in 400, Sparta – with the aid of treachery from within – expelled the Messenians who, under Athenian protection and after the so-called third Messenian war around 460, had settled at Naupaktos and on Kephallenia. These now departed for Sicily and Libya. Also at this period, Sparta made war on the Aitolians: problems of chronology leave it doubtful if this was in revenge for help which Aitolia had given to the Eleans and which had led to a heavy defeat of Sparta’s allies in the Gymnasion district at the gates of Elis (Diod.Sic. 14.17.10).

12.1.5 Central Greece

Sparta also takes an active interest in Greek states further north. She re-establishes control over her colony of Herakleia-in-Trachis, near Thermopylai in the Malian Gulf,²⁴ giving her commander there, Herippidas, absolute authority. In the event he behaved as an utter tyrant. With this base at the gates of Thessaly, Sparta had dealings with the city of Pharsalos, which asked for a garrison to protect against the threat from Macedon. Also, she reached an agreement with the autocrat of Pherai, who had claims to an overlordship of Thessaly. Sparta lacked the resources to intervene more deeply in Thessalian affairs, but these good relations with leading Thessalians did allow her to exert control over Boiotia, in the north.

New military engagement in Central Greece was now triggered by the policy

of Thebes, currently under the influence of a democratic faction led by Ismenias. The conflict spread to other states, and the focus of campaigning shifted towards the region of Corinth. The grounds for dispute between Thebes and Sparta were indeed inflammatory. The Spartans had refused (in 404?) to give Thebes, for consecration to Delphic Apollo, a tithe of the booty taken in the war against Athens. Like Corinthians and Eleans, Thebans had refused to hand over to Sparta the Athenian exiles who had taken refuge with them during the regime of the Thirty at Athens; they had even gone so far as to punish formally anyone who refused to harbour an Athenian refugee. Theban territory had been the base from which Athenian democrats, led by Thrasyboulos, set out on their successful reconquest of power in 404/3, and Thebes had further offended by refusing to join Sparta in attacking the Athenian democrats in Peiraeus. Finally there was the intolerable insult to Agesilaos at Aulis, even if he clearly should have asked permission for his sacrifice from the Boiotians, who were still Sparta's allies, even if they had refused to take part in his eastern expedition. However, hostilities when they did come arrived by an indirect route, a dispute over borders and pasturing rights between Lokrians, allies of Thebes, and men from Phokis, which was allied to Sparta (*Hell.* 3.5.3–5; *HO*, Chambers 19–21; *MK* XVI–XVIII). The former had attempted to fine the latter for using contested land which they claimed; the latter had retaliated by invading not only the disputed territory but Lokris itself. Our sources mention various manoeuvres and acts of provocation which cannot be confirmed. Was this merely a routine dispute between shepherds from neighbouring states, or was there deliberate provocation inspired by Thebes which brought about an ultimatum from Sparta?²⁵ We cannot tell. But what is absolutely clear is that both sides, Thebes and Sparta, were willing to go to war with all speed.

12.2 The So-Called Corinthian War and the Peace of Antalkidas (395–386)

Although it began in Central Greece, the reason why the war shifted to the region around the Isthmos is that the anti-Spartan coalition chose Corinth as its rallying point, in order to deny Sparta the land route out of the Peloponnese.²⁶ Spartan actions were arousing more and more opposition in Greece, even though within many cities there was disagreement on the matter. Greeks were well aware that Sparta was aiming at hegemony, even if, in 404, when Athenian walls were destroyed, some had dreamed of Sparta as a 'liberator' (from Athenian hegemony) (*Hell.* 2.3.23). The war against Elis pointed unmistakably to a Spartan desire for hegemony. The states which had refused to join Agesilaos' expedition to Asia Minor – Thebes, Corinth and Athens – would now form, with Argos, the nucleus of a large coalition.

Sparta's idea of alliance and hegemony was offending more and more cities. Sparta was launching military expeditions without consulting her allies, but was then demanding that the allies take part in them. If they refused, whether to go against Elis or against Persia, they were accused of treachery. Even more offensive was Sparta's intervention in states' internal affairs, by supporting oligarchic groups in attempts to seize power even in cities, such as Phleious, where a democratic regime had behaved as a loyal ally. At Sparta, the ghost of Lysandros' dekadarchies still walked.

Now, a hegemony as authoritarian as this needs to have garrisons and harmosts in the cities it wants to control, an army ever alert to intervene as threats appear, and the support of allied forces or mercenaries. A policy of this kind was offensive not only to Greeks: its effects spilled over into the Aegean area and thus alarmed King Artaxerxes who was practised in the art of playing on the rivalries between Greek states, in order to counter whichever of them was dominant. Xenophon attributes the Greek coalition against Sparta to the corrupting effect of Persian money: Timokrates of Rhodes, acting on the orders of Tithraustes, the new satrap at Sardis, is said to have bought the main political leaders in various city-states (*Hell.* 3.5.1). It was this dagger in the back which allegedly forced Agesilaos to leave Asia, with most of his troops. This was not, however, the view of the author of the *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia* (Chambers, 10.2). According to him, the hostility towards Sparta had arisen far earlier than the arrival of Timokrates with his money: 'And yet some say that the money from him was the cause of concerted action by these people and some of the Boiotians and some in the other cities previously mentioned. But they do not know that all had long been ill-disposed towards the Spartans, looking out for a way that they might make the cities adopt a war policy. For the Argives and the Boiotians hated the Spartans because they treated as friends their enemies among the citizens' (transl MK VII.2). The text, then, does not deny that politicians took Timokrates' money: what it does deny is that this was the determining factor (Rung, 2004).

Argos and Sparta were enemies of old, and Thebes' enmity we have explained above. The situation at Corinth is hard to read: those who rejected submission to the Spartans, remembering the days when Corinth had been a counterweight to Sparta within the Peloponnesian League, were not necessarily proponents of democracy. However, there does seem to have been intense opposition between oligarchs who relied on Sparta and a faction which proposed complete independence. At Athens, no one would have claimed to be a partisan of Sparta after the painful episode of the Thirty Tyrants, supported by Lysandros, in 404–3. However, while some had long supported the actions of Konon, the democrats as a whole hesitated to risk Spartan wrath, as can be seen from the episode of Demainetos' triremes. These had been sent to Konon, but Athens officially disavowed the action, following a protest from the Spartan harmost of Aigina, in 396/5. Athenians

varied in how cautious they were towards the state which had recently conquered their city. But there were some who 'desired to turn the Athenians from tranquillity and peace and lead them towards war and interventionist policy (*polypragmonein*) so that it might be possible for them to obtain money from the public treasury' (*HO*, Chambers 10.2; trans. MK VII.2). Expressions of this kind were normal from critics of the democracy, but in this case there is ambiguity. We cannot tell whether personal corruption is meant, as of the politician Epikrates, or whether the author means the desire of others to qualify for payment for military service, or civilian salaries, from the state, moneys which since the loss of the empire had become far less dependable.

12.2.1 The war in Boiotia and the anti-Spartan coalition (395)

Lysandros' role was to attack Boiotia from Phokis in the north west, with the Phokidians, and other allies from the general region – including men of Orchomenos, which he had managed to detach from the Boiotian confederacy. From the south, the Peloponnesian army was to be led by king Pausanias; he and Lysandros were to meet at Haliartos in Boiotia, and then to attack together. Possibly Lysandros marched too quickly, or perhaps the king advanced too slowly. In any case, Lysandros arrived first, chose to attack without waiting for the king's force, and was killed in the process. Pausanias arrived to find that defeat was already a fact. With the agreement of his generals, he refused to pit his own demoralized army against a far stronger enemy force. He requested a truce to pick up the bodies of his dead men; the Boiotians agreed, but only on condition that he then evacuate the territory. This he did.

'Pausanias, on returning to Sparta, was put on trial for his life.²⁷ He was charged with various offences: that he had arrived at Haliartos after Lysandros, whereas it had been agreed that they should arrive on the same day; that he had recovered the dead under truce without even having attempted combat; that he had [years earlier] allowed the Athenian democrats to leave Peiraieus after having them under his control; and also that he had not presented himself for trial on these charges. For these reasons he was condemned to death. He went into exile at Tegea, and died there of illness.' (*Hell.* 3.5.25) We see here what lay behind the condemnation of the king: Pausanias had made decisions contrary to the form of imperialism embodied by Agis and Lysandros. Yet, as a spirit of revolt seethed in Greece, it was this latter form of imperialism which Sparta now adopted – with the support of king Agesilaos.

Sparta had lost a battle, but not the war: she retained her threat. Next, 'the Boiotians and the Athenians, and with them the men of Corinth and Argos,

allied with each other. They thought that by making a combination of the main cities, they would easily overthrow the hegemony of Sparta, since the burden of Spartan domination (*epistasia*) had made Sparta hated by its own allies.' (Diod. Sic. 14.82.1–2) The list of those states which fought in the coming war shows that the coalition was joined by the cities of Euboia, both Lokrian territories (Opuntian and Ozolian), the Malians, the Akarnanians, probably also cities of Chalkidike led by Olynthos, and many of the Thessalians. Sparta's garrison in Thessaly was driven out of Pharsalos, and her forward post in central Greece, Herakleia-in-Trachis, was lost – for ever, as it turned out.

12.2.2 The war of Corinth

Coming together at Corinth, the anti-Spartan allies proposed to challenge their enemy in its home territory of Laconia and Messenia from 394 (*Hell.* 4.2.11). As this threat developed, the Spartans recalled Agesilaos who then claimed that he had been driven out of Asia not by Persian arms but by Persian money.

The summer of 394 shows Sparta's power of resistance. In June Aristodamos, exercising command for the young king Agesipolis, won a victory on the threshold of Corinthian territory, by the river Nemea. His army was scarcely more than half the size of the opposition: 13,500 hoplites and 600 cavalry against 24,000 hoplites and 1450 cavalry – without mentioning the light-armed soldiers present. The Spartans surpassed their Theban opponents in knowing how to exploit enemy weaknesses. In August, Agesilaos and his army arrived in Boiotia. Their passage through Thessaly had been difficult, but they had managed to defeat the Pharsalian cavalry at NARTHAKION. In Boiotia, the king won a pitched battle near Koroneia. His men, however, suffered considerable losses, and he himself was wounded; in contrast, his principal enemies the Thebans emerged relatively unscathed. The victory allowed him to secure Orchomenos and Phokis, and to head for Sparta with the spoils of his campaigning. He sent a detachment of his army to Lokris to ravage the country, but this force met serious resistance; its commander, Gyllis, was killed, and the troops called off their attack.

Agesilaos' successes were small compensation for the naval defeat which Sparta had suffered in the eastern Aegean, at Knidos, at the hands of Konon. This defeat was so significant that Agesilaos preferred initially to inform his troops instead that Sparta had been victorious at sea, so as not to demoralize them as they were about to give battle at Koroneia. In reality, Sparta's fleet had been destroyed, and the cities of the eastern Greek world were now 'liberated' from Spartan control, in other words from garrisons. This was the end of realistic Spartan hopes of dominating the Aegean. Sporadic campaigning would continue, and some cities would be won back by pro-

Spartan forces, but Spartan hegemony at sea was now at an end (Diod. Sic. 14.84.4). Significantly, Theopompos chose the battle of Knidos as the point at which to end his history, a work which he presented as a sequel to Thucydides.

For Sparta, worse was to come. In the Spring of 393, Pharnabazos and Konon captured the large island of Kythera, off the south-eastern coast of Laconia and normally under Sparta's intimate control. Kythera would now be a base allowing Sparta's enemies to raid Laconia and Messenia; from now on, Sparta knew that the helots had an incentive to revolt. In addition, Konon procured from Persia funds and men to go to complete the rebuilding of the fortification walls of Peiraieus and also the Long Walls between Peiraieus and Athens, thereby enhancing Athens' capacity to defy Sparta. He also obtained funding for a troop of Thracian mercenaries, peltasts (light-armed with javelins), who were put under the command of the Athenian Iphikrates.

After a relatively uneventful 393, the year 392 saw an intensification of action. At Corinth, at the festival of Eukleia in March, political tensions culminated in a massacre of some of the pro-Spartan oligarchs; others were exiled and, subsequently, they were invited back but betrayed the city to Sparta. The bitter division within Corinth concerned attitudes towards Sparta, rather than the city's internal forms of government. The *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia* refers only to change of 'policy' rather than of institutions (*pragmata* rather than *politeia*: Chambers 10.3; MK VII.3). Similarly with the union of the two cities of Corinth and Argos which took place at this period, and was probably motivated more by anti-Spartan than by pro-democratic sentiment, even though much remains obscure. Diodorus (14.92.1) writes in terms of military conquest: 'The Argives, with their full citizen army (*pandēmei*), campaigned against Corinth. Gaining control of the akropolis and possession of the town, they turned the territory (*chōra*) of Corinth into an Argive country.' Xenophon, on the other hand, does not write of conquest but rather of a sort of passive acceptance on the part of Corinth which he blames on enemies of Sparta and which resulted in Corinth's being absorbed by Argos (*Hell.* 4.4.6; 8.34; 5.1.34). However, the subsequent events do not support this latter idea, even though the citadel of Akrocorinth was guarded by Argive troops and the two cities celebrated the Isthmian Games in common (Paus. 3.10.1). I am inclined to think that a form of *isopoliteia* was involved, with citizens of each state enjoying full citizen rights when present in the other. What may have given the impression of imbalance is the fact that many troops from Argos were present in Corinth, while the reverse was not the case. Also, accusing Argos of having improperly taken over Corinth, by eliminating the ruling oligarchic faction, was a way of justifying Spartan intervention.

In 391 Agesilaos returned to action, which resulted in defeats for the anti-Spartan alliance. The Argolid was ravaged, and combined action by the king and a group of Corinthians led to the capture of the walls linking Corinth and

its port of Lechaion, then of Krommyon and Sidous on the east coast, and of the temple of Poseidon where, in May–June of 390, Agesilaos disrupted the celebration of the Isthmian Games (*Hell.* 4.5.1–2; Plut., *Ages.* 21.3–6). With help from Athens the walls between Corinth and Lechaion were rebuilt, and the Spartans were besieged in the latter town, which allowed the anti-Spartan alliance to refuse all offers of peace. The position of the Corinthians, however, became increasingly difficult. Control of shipping in the Corinthian Gulf was now in Spartan hands. Control of Lechaion was regained by Agesilaos, with the help of his half-brother, Teleutias. The king then launched a major attack in the direction of the Isthmos, occupying Peiraion and the sanctuary of the Heraion at Perachora. He had thus cut off access by land to the Peloponnese from the north, while he himself now had a forward base for invading Boiotia. No mercy was shown to the prisoners Agesilaos took, who had taken refuge at the shrine of Hera but who were linked with the massacre of the Eukleia: they were sold as slaves, or handed over to their domestic enemies.²⁸

In 390, however, Sparta's momentum was spoiled by an unforeseen event. A Spartan hoplite *mora* (one sixth of the army) had gone out to escort a group of soldiers from Amyklai who were heading south across enemy territory on their way home to Sparta to celebrate the festival of the Hyakinthia. On its return, the *mora* was caught in open country by Iphikrates' peltasts and destroyed. For Agesilaos, who had freely expressed his contempt for these light-armed troops, this was painful disgrace. The incident, though untypical, caused the king to return furtively to Sparta. To avoid hostile celebrations en route, and to conceal the extent of his losses, he chose to avoid passing through the towns of the Peloponnese in daylight (*Hell.* 4.5.7–18). From now on, Spartan operations were conducted less energetically. They brought exhaustion upon Argos and Corinth, but no decisive victory for Sparta.

The situation, then, was one neither of success nor of peace. Ever concerned to preserve their authority, the Spartans sought to defend their allies the Achaians by sending Agesilaos against Achaia's enemies across the Corinthian Gulf, the Akarnanians. The result was hardly a triumph, but threatened with a second destruction of their crops in 388 the Akarnanians conceded defeat. Sparta's other king, Agesipolis, ravaged the Argolid but without damaging the city of Argos itself.

What had these years of war achieved for the respective parties? The Spartans had proved their capacity to withstand attack, and had succeeded in keeping the war at a distance; their own home territory was spared, unlike that of others. Corinth still remained torn by internal dissension, but the party favouring peace gained ground as the population was worn down by enemy ravaging of their land and also by the constant presence of armies to feed. Their allies had lost much of their efficacy, Iphikrates and his peltasts having been obliged to leave at the demand of Argos. What was missing on the anti-Spartan side was the unity of command which Sparta enjoyed over the forces

of its own league. There was, then, no clear winner, and a 'Common Peace' would be imposed on both sides.

12.2.3 The 'King's Peace', or 'the Peace of Antalkidas': 386

For some time attempts had been made to persuade the Great King to sponsor a general peace. In 392 (*Hell.* 4.8.12–15) Sparta had sent Antalkidas to propose a peace in return for Sparta's giving up to Persia control of the Greek cities of Asia Minor. At that point various Greeks had been opposed to the idea, including Konon who came with others on an embassy to Persia. And the King himself was against, reckoning that Sparta remained more of a threat than Athens or Thebes. Indeed, the Spartan Thibron did return, to lead plundering expeditions from Ephesos and the Maeander valley. However, the situation began to change radically. Thibron was defeated and killed, Tiribazos made an able defence of Sparta's cause, and had Konon imprisoned. Fresh peace negotiations, between Athens and Sparta, failed because Athens rejected the idea of the eastern Greeks' submitting to Persia. The Athenians went as far as condemning their own negotiators to exile; among the latter was Andokides, who wrote the (surviving) speech *On The Peace*, which contains the earliest surviving usage of the expression 'Common Peace' (*koinē eirēnē*).

The Athenians resumed activity in the Aegean. A naval campaign led by Thrasyboulos in 390/89 re-established Athenian influence, instituted the raising of taxes and opened new conflicts – until Thrasyboulos was assassinated in Pamphylia because of extortions by his soldiers. In addition, the King was anxious to have his hands free to intervene on a grand scale in Cyprus, against Evagoras. Circumstances, then, were such that Persia gave a more sympathetic hearing to Spartan arguments for peace. On their side, the Spartans wished to be rid of naval operations in the Aegean, in order to re-establish their supremacy on the Greek mainland. This time Antalkidas was able to bring negotiations to fruition, and a peace treaty was sworn on the following terms: 'King Artaxerxes thinks it right that the cities of Asia should belong to him, as well as, of the islands, Klazomenai and Cyprus, but that the other Greek cities, big and small, should be left autonomous, with the exception of Lemnos, Imbros and Skyros: as in the past, these should belong to the Athenians. Any who do not agree to this peace (*eirēnē*) I shall make war on, with the help of those who do agree to it, on land and sea, with my fleet and my treasury' (*Hell.* 5.1.31). As Diodorus wrote (14.110.4), the other Greeks had no longer the strength to resist, and particularly the Athenians who found their imports of food from the Black Sea region threatened by Antalkidas' campaign against Abydos, on the Asian side of the Hellespont –

Sparta had learned to hit where it hurt. The Athenians therefore submitted to peace terms which they found for several reasons shameful: the Greeks of Asia were abandoned, and Persia was to support the Spartans in any action which promoted the peace settlement.

12.2.4 Agesilaos and Sparta's interpretation of cities' 'autonomy'

The reference in the peace treaty to the 'autonomy' of the cities was exploited by Sparta to forbid the formation of any league of states *other than Sparta's own*. In this way, Sparta could deal with cities which were isolated, and more liable to generate internal treachery in her interest. Corinth was obliged to abandon its 'union' with Argos, and to rejoin Sparta's league. The city was no longer willing to fight for its freedom, its population being weary of seeing their land used as a battlefield. The treatment received by three other cities, Mantinea, Olynthos and Thebes, shows even more starkly how Sparta interpreted the 'autonomy' of others. The case of Mantinea is the most difficult to understand. Sparta opened a military campaign against the city in 385, led by king Agesipolis, son of the exiled Pausanias. The Mantineians refused Sparta's demand that they demolish their city walls. A siege followed, with the city receiving no outside help other than that of a party of Argives.

Athens dared not intervene, and Thebes actually came in on the Spartan side. Agesipolis cunningly diverted the city's river, then running high from autumn rains, and used it to sap the foundations of Mantinea's defences. The city was thus taken, and partly destroyed, much of its population being dispersed into the villages which, in the second quarter of the fifth century, had been united by *synoikismos*. These small communities, henceforward deemed 'autonomous', would inevitably have to submit to Sparta's every demand, most notably to supply soldiers. Further, they were now under the control of the wealthiest landowners, supporters of Sparta's action (*Hell.* 5.2.7, Paus. 8.8.9–10). Agesipolis, however, spared the lives of the leaders of Mantinea's democratic faction, and of the Argive fighters captured with them; in this he was following the advice of his father, exiled in Tegea. Sparta thus had intervened to dismantle a city which, like Greek cities generally, had been formed by the merging of villages large and small. This was a signal to all that the Spartans claimed the right to intervene in any city which showed a degree of resistance to their commands. The offence of Mantinea had been to refuse to take part in some of the wars which Sparta had decided on; also, the Mantineians had supplied Argos with grain.²⁹

In 382, Sparta intervened in Chalkidike, in the north east of the Greek mainland. Olynthos, the largest city of the area, wanted to create a confederacy of Chalkidian cities, to protect their independence against

Thracian and Macedonian neighbours but also to be able to resist demands from Sparta. Some local cities, however, notably Akanthos and Apollonia, were opposed to the idea, and sought support, first, from king Amyntas of Macedonia, who was only too happy to prevent the formation of this confederacy on his borders, and, second, from Sparta. Spartan enthusiasm for intervention was increased by the prospect that here also were the beginnings of an understanding between Thebes, Athens and Olynthos. In the resulting campaign against Olynthos, Agesipolis was killed. But what forced Sparta's opponents to surrender, in 379, was – once more – starvation. Olynthos was forced to ally with Sparta, and to promise to follow on campaign wherever the Spartans might order. Also in 379, the city of Phleious, in the northern Peloponnese, received attention. Phleious had always helped with Sparta's military operations; this was where the troops of Sparta's alliance gathered when heading north on campaign. But now Phleious would pay the price for refusing demands from Sparta, more precisely from Agesilaos, concerning her internal politics and the status of Sparta's most committed partisans in the city. Claiming that Sparta's friends had been wronged, and against the wishes of many in his own army, Agesilaos besieged Phleious and forced its surrender – again through starvation – in 379. Those who had opposed Sparta were killed, and an oligarchic regime was established.³⁰

On a formal level, Sparta could assert as justification for its interventions a need to come to the aid of pro-Spartan partisans or of oligarchic regimes which felt threatened. And so it was in the case of Boiotia. Here, Theban oligarchs, and cities opposed to the Boiotian league (*koinon*), were ready to support Spartan initiatives. In Xenophon's view, it was intervention against Thebes, contrary to every rule of conduct, which led to the ruin of Sparta, and that at a time when Sparta's various earlier successes 'gave every reason to think that Sparta's hegemony was everywhere firmly established' (*Hell.* 5.3.27). When in 386 they had been obliged to swear to the terms of the peace, the Thebans had wanted to do so in the name of their allies and of the Boiotian league. But Agesilaos had refused, and compelled them to submit. Four years later, in 382, the Spartan Phoibidas, who had set out with troops destined for Chalkidike, stopped at Thebes to help the oligarch Leontiades and his friends in seizing control of the city's akropolis, the Kadmeia.³¹ All who opposed them were eliminated, and Leontiades had the satisfaction of seeing his rival, the democrat Ismenias, subjected to a sham trial by the Spartans and then put to death by them. The Boiotian league was abolished. Although 'the ephors and most of the Spartans were displeased with Phoibidas, who had acted without official approval from Sparta' (*Hell.* 5.2.32), Agesilaos, citing the interests of the Spartan state, succeeded in preventing him from being condemned, and we hear of him later as harmost of Thespiiai (in Boiotia), in 378. There could be no argument: this Spartan attack on Thebes in peacetime was entirely in breach of traditional rules of behaviour. But nothing took precedence over Sparta's own interests, as Agesilaos conceived them. Even

Xenophon, elsewhere so admiring of Agesilaos, saw the unjust acquittal of Phoibidas as the cause of Sparta's later expulsion from Thebes: here was 'proof that the gods do not forget the perpetrators of wicked and unholy (*asebeia*, *anosia*) actions'.³²

The Thebans thereafter worked ceaselessly to retake their own city and to regain control of Boiotia. Survivors of the massacre had taken refuge, under the leadership of Pelopidas, in Athens. There they came to terms with democratic government and later they allied formally with Athens. In 379/8, with the help of other Boiotians and of Athenians, they recaptured Thebes. Sparta's garrison there was compelled to surrender, and to head off homewards. Though it had received no reinforcements, its commander would be put to death at Sparta anyway.³³ On their way home, the soldiers from the garrison met, at Megara, the army which had been sent out to relieve them, under the command of the new king Kleombrotos (*Hell.* 5.4.1–12; *Diod. Sic.* 15.25–7). The latter restricted himself to making a display of force. The other king, Agesilaos, had excused himself from the command on the grounds of his advanced age; in reality, he feared that other Spartans would say that 'for the sake of supporting tyrants, Agesilaos is going against the interests of his own city' (*Hell.* 5.4.13)

Sparta, then, had – without care or forethought – seized control of a city on which she had not declared war, even though the growing hostility of Thebes had been palpable. After the failure of the venture, Sparta preferred to punish a commander who had been left in a hopeless position, rather than admit that the city itself had been at fault. Signs of resistance to this policy were apparent immediately: even within Sparta there was criticism of the direction in which foreign policy – under pressure from Agesilaos – was going. Elsewhere in Greece, Sparta's action had promoted rapprochement between Thebes and neighbouring Athens. In spite of a prohibition issued by Sparta, Athens had sheltered Boiotian exiles, as Athenians had themselves been given shelter by Boiotians in 404/3. After returning to their own city, the Theban 'democrats' reorganised the Boiotian *koinon*, which had been abolished after the capture of the Kadmeia in 382, giving it a structure which was apparently more democratic, but which ultimately had the effect of reinforcing the primacy of Thebes. Every Greek city now knew that, even in peacetime, it was never safe from a Spartan putsch. Nevertheless, Sparta in 377 still had sufficient authority to create a widespread mobilization for a war which Sparta alone had decided on. According to Diodorus (15.31.2), Arcadians, Eleans, Achaians, Corinthians, Megarians, Sikyonians, Phleiasians, inhabitants of the coastal Argolid, Akarnanians, Phokidians and Locrians, Olynthians and Thracians answered Sparta's call. At that point, the whole of the Peloponnese (apart from Argos) and of the area around the Isthmos was at Sparta's command, as well as much of central Greece and the Greek cities of Thrace. Others, meanwhile, such as Thebes and Athens, had long remained prudently

inactive.

Apparently in firm control of the Greek mainland, Sparta little by little lost control of the Greek cities. Possibly the move too far was the failed attempt of Sphodrias, Sparta's harmost in Thespiiai, to seize control of Athens' port, Peiraieus, by surprise in 378, at the very moment when Spartan ambassadors were in Athens for negotiations. Xenophon (*Hell.* 5.4.20) and Plutarch (*Ages.* 24.6) saw this attempted coup as a manipulation by Thebes, designed to provoke Athens into giving Thebes active support against Sparta. Diodorus, on the other hand, suggests that it was a machination by king Kleombrotos (15.29.5), who induced Sphodrias to make his venture in order to show his fellow Spartans how dangerous was their desire to control Boiotia.³⁴ However that may be, the two Spartan kings did not allow Sphodrias to be condemned, something which might have appeased Sparta's opponents. Instead, they colluded to procure his acquittal. From the lengthy explanations given by our sources for the acquittal, two points emerge clearly. The anti-Theban policy had its opponents, notably Kleombrotos. And the Spartans again show themselves unaware of the seriously negative effect of their refusal to condemn one of their own fellow citizens when he had violated treaties. This episode must be part of the reason for the alignment of states with Athens, which would occur soon afterwards.

12.3 Heading for the Fall? (378–371)

Fear of Sparta helped to generate defensive alliances between other states. In consequence the balance of power in Greece changed for long enough to make possible the permanent collapse of the Spartan empire.

12.3.1 An anti-Spartan league

The Second Athenian Confederacy, as scholars usually call it, was above all a combination of cities which chose to ally with Athens rather than to face in isolation the risk of attack by Sparta. From 384 Athens has an official alliance with Chios, designed to be compatible with the King's Peace: 'and there shall remain in force the peace and the oaths and the agreement now existing; and make the Chians allies on terms of freedom and autonomy, not contravening any of the things written on the *stēlai* about the peace, nor being persuaded if anyone else transgresses, as far as possible' (*IG* II². 34; trans. RO 20. I. 17–24) The network of defensive alliances came to include Byzantion, Rhodes, Mytilene and perhaps Methymna, as well as (initially) Thebes. All the treaties made in this connection refer explicitly to the King's Peace, which was seen as a guarantee of protection rather than as an excuse for intervention. In 377

an Athenian decree, proposed by one Aristoteles, invited all those who were not subjects of the King to ally themselves with the existing group, 'so that the Spartans shall allow the Greeks to be free and autonomous, and to live at peace occupying their own territory in security' (*IG* II². 43; trans. RO 22. 1. 9-12), through the application of the King's Peace. Later, other cities joined this alliance, in the Aegean, the Hellespont, Thrace and (to the west of mainland Greece) the Ionian Sea: evidently it was now the imperialism of Sparta which caused more alarm than that of Athens. Indeed, Athens now explicitly renounced the use of instruments of control such as garrisons, foreign officials and tribute.

12.3.2 Spartan operations

Sparta's anti-Theban policy in these years is somewhat obscure to us, through shortage of evidence. In 378 Agesilaos conducted a modest campaign, and installed, as harmost of Thespiiai, Phoibidas who confined himself to plundering operations; these proved pointless now that the Thebans had taken control of Oreos on Euboia to guarantee their food supply (*Hell.* 5. 4. 56-7). In 377 Agesilaos conducted a further campaign, with troops who had been impressively reorganized, according to Diodorus (15.31), but he avoided a grand set-piece battle and succeeded only in annoying his allies. After his return to Sparta, he was apparently put out of action for several years by problems with his blood circulation. In 376 king Kleombrotos' expedition against Boiotia got no further than Mount Kithairon, and in 375 two battallions (*morai*) of Sparta troops were defeated near Orchomenos by Theban forces trained by Epameinondas and Pelopidas – a success which became famous, since the Theban troops were considerably outnumbered (Diod. 15.37).

With a new self-confidence, Thebes from now on would show ambitions of its own for hegemony. Sparta, on the other hand, was so weakened that it did not dare to intervene in Thessaly, to defend Polydamas of Pharsalos against the attacks of Jason of Pherai (*Hell.* 6.1).

Tired of futile campaigning, the allies came to Sparta and protested. They demanded that the Spartans conduct a potent naval expedition, to inflict hunger upon Athens and to lend troops in Phokis, west of Boiotia. However, in 376 the naval squadron commanded by the Spartan Pollis, who had hoped to block a convoy of wheat bound for Athens off Cape Geraistos south of Euboia, was defeated. Athens had launched a fleet under the command of Chabrias, to secure control of the Aegean and to bolster its alliances: this fleet won a major victory over Sparta off Naxos. In western Greece, in 375, a naval squadron commanded by Timotheos son of Konon sailed along the coast of the Peloponnese and then seized Kerkyra (Corfu). Shortly afterwards, Timotheos defeated the Spartan high admiral Nikolochos off Alyzeia, a place

on the Akarnanian coast opposite Leukas, but was unable to follow up his victory through lack of funds. Notwithstanding, he succeeded in bringing Athens new allies in the area: Akarnanians, Kephallenia and the Molossians. In the thirty years since Aigospotamoi, Athens had never been so successful.

There was widespread desire among Greeks to put an end to what seemed an interminable war, and also much anxiety about the rise of Thebes. In 375 a new peace treaty was sworn, which stipulated that all foreign garrisons be withdrawn and a team of inspectors be created to check on compliance. It has sometimes been thought that Thebes refused to swear to this treaty, but this may well be wrong: Thebes is still found as a member of the Athenian alliance in 373/2 (*IG* II² 1607.49). In any case, this peace, which was celebrated enthusiastically at Athens with the erection of an altar to Peace (*Eirēnē*) in the Agora, was shortlived. In the Peloponnese, tensions were growing between the ruling oligarchs and their democratic opponents, many of them in exile, who hoped to regain power as Sparta weakened. In Phigalia, Corinth, Megara, Sicyon and Phleious exiles returned, triggering massacres and a new wave of refugees.³⁵ West of the Greek mainland, on the Ionian Sea, the presence of Timotheos (Konon's son, it would never be forgotten) was a threat to Spartan domination: new clashes resulted. In 373 Sparta managed once again to assemble a fleet of some 60 ships, thanks to its maritime allies: Corinth, Elis, Achaia, Epidauros, Troizen, Hermione and Halieis in the Argolic peninsula, Leukas, Ambrakia and Zakynthos on the Ionian Sea (*Hell.* 6.2.3). Sparta's authority, we see, was still considerable. But the commander of this fleet, Mnasippos, wasted his opportunities. He landed with his troops on Kerkyra and, without winning the trust of the local oligarchs, plundered the territory and besieged the town of Kerkyra itself. To his own troops he behaved badly, failing to pay his mercenaries in spite of the ample booty he had acquired. As a result, when troops of Kerkyra, driven to extremes by hunger, made a desperate sortie from the town, they actually won: Mnasippos was killed, his troops quit, and what was left of his naval squadron took refuge on the neighbouring isle of Leukas.³⁶ At this point, to add to Sparta's problems, an Athenian fleet under Iphikrates intervened. Passing northward along the coast of Messenia, and training his crews on the way, Iphikrates took control of Kephallenia and then reached Kerkyra. There he defeated the fleet from Syracuse in Sicily, which Sparta had summoned to the rescue, then headed off to bring help to hard-pressed cities of Akarnania. He also prepared to return to the coasts of the Peloponnese, to make trouble for Sparta and in the hope of winning over several towns.

12.3.3 Sparta's black year: 371

On the Theban front, Sparta's position was hardly more encouraging. Since

373, Thebes had brutally conquered the Boiotian cities of Tanagra and Thespiiai, had captured and razed the city of Plataiai and taken over its territory, stripped of its previous inhabitants. Thebes then threatened the neighbouring state of Phokis, which appealed to Sparta for help. These were the difficult circumstances in which a new peace conference was held at Sparta in July 371, at the request of the King of Persia (*Hell.* 6.3; Diod. Sic. 15.50.4). Many of those who spoke expressed their alarm at the brutal expansion of Thebes. The peace treaty which resulted was little different from its predecessors, except that this time there was no longer any requirement to go to the aid of a city which was wronged. The treaty foundered on the same rock as the others: Sparta retained the right to swear in the name of its allies, whereas the Spartans still would not recognize a similar right for Thebes. A violent altercation took place between Agesilaos of Sparta and Epameinondas of Thebes, underlining the weakness of the Spartan position. But Agesilaos would not yield the point, and Thebes accordingly refused to swear to the peace.

Across Greece the garrisons disappeared, and places which had been occupied reverted to their rightful possessors. But the army of Sparta remained on a war footing. Overriding those few voices which spoke for the promises of peace to be respected,³⁷ the Spartan assembly decided not to recall the army currently in Phokis but to proceed to punish Thebes. Kleombrotos enjoyed a few minor successes before the big confrontation, which took place on the plain of Leuktra. He made the mistake of positioning his cavalry directly in front of his hoplite phalanx, which would result in confusion among the phalanx when the cavalry was charged by the Theban horse. Epameinondas innovated: his new tactic was to invert the normal order of battle. He reinforced his left wing to an unusual degree and made it, rather than the right wing, his principal point of attack. With the support of the 'sacred band' commanded by Pelopidas, he succeeded in breaking through the lines of Sparta's best warriors, who were deployed on Sparta's right, around the king. The result was slaughter: of 700 Spartan citizens present, 400 died, including king Kleombrotos. News of the disaster reached Sparta in the middle of the festival of the Gymnopaidiai. To allow the celebrations to be properly completed, the ephors decided not to make clear how serious the news was.³⁸ But Sparta's military reaction was unhesitating: immediately a new expedition was sent out, under the command of prince Archidamos. Xenophon reports that this expedition involved the enthusiastic participation of Tegeates, Mantineians, Corinthians, Sicyonians, Phleiasians and Achaians. We might doubt his truthfulness unless we remember how worrying Thebes was becoming for people who saw their own future as dependent on Sparta's. Jason, the new ruler of Thessaly, intervened to calm the Thebans and to arrange a truce under which the defeated Peloponnesian soldiers returned home. Athens, observing that Sparta still had not lost the support of its allies, proposed yet another King's Peace. This time the oath to which the cities swore was, 'if anyone

campaigns against any of the cities which have taken this oath, I shall go to help the city attacked with all of my might'. Help for victims had thus become obligatory. 'The Athenians and the others voted, as the King had laid down, that the cities large and small should be equally autonomous. And they sent out men to receive the oath with the order that it should be the highest authorities in every state who swore it.' It was thus no longer possible for a state to swear on behalf of members of its league. This time it was Elis which refused (*Hell.* 6.5.1–3).

No doubt it was expected that passions would subside, following the adjustments which this peace treaty involved. At Argos, an attempted oligarchic coup ended in a bloodbath, after Sparta had decided not to intervene.³⁹ At Mantinea the various villages came together in a new synoikism, adopted a set of democratic institutions and rebuilt a city wall with the help of Elis. When the Spartan king Agesilaos duly demanded that the Mantineians give up this synoikism, the latter firmly refused, their officials arguing that Mantinea as a city had voted for it (*Hell.* 6.5.35). Sparta's relations with Arkadia then took a dramatic turn for the worse. In Tegea the democratic faction took power, aided by the Mantineians. An Arkadian confederacy resulted, which Sparta decided to oppose, claiming that it involved the breaking of solemn oaths. Agesilaos led a military expedition against the confederacy, in the winter of 370/69, aided by the fact that, as always, the Arkadians were at odds with each other. The latter did receive help from Elis and Argos, but Athens disappointed them by remaining neutral; accordingly they invoked the help of Thebes. When the Boiotians led by Epameinondas duly arrived, they found that Agesilaos had left and had disbanded his army; they themselves were then minded to return home. The Arkadians, however, held out the enticing prospect of an easy conquest of Sparta, if – weakened as she was – she were attacked by surprise in the middle of winter. Thebans and their allies did accordingly invade Spartan territory, in 369, pillaging and burning for three months. Sparta's home villages did not in the event fall to the enemy, but Sparta lost several perioikic cities and also, crucially, her vast subject territory of Messenia. At Ithome, Epameinondas personally supervised the building of a capital city for the new state: Messene. The massive fortification walls of Mt Ithome were designed above all to repel Sparta. Parts of them survive to this day, an indirect but clear testimony to the once-fearsome nature of Spartan imperialism.

Thus protected, Messenians, including exiles scattered far over the Greek world, would come together to form an independent state in defiance of their former masters. In retrospect, we know that the Spartans had lost these western lands forever. With them was lost Sparta's status as a great power.

12.4 Agesilaos or the Spartans? The Spartans or the Lakedaimonians?

What then had become of Sparta's promises to 'free' the Greeks from Athenian imperialism and from the power of Persia? Sparta's ambition to turn the Greek mainland into a vast empire of her own provoked hatred that proved overwhelming, in spite of certain undeniable successes and in spite also of remarkable loyalty shown by most of her allies. Who, in this period, decided policy at Sparta? Everything indicates that it was the influence of king Agesilaos which predominated, even at moments when, for reasons of ill health or political discretion, he may appear not to have been at the forefront. The reign of this king had been embattled from the start. The general and politician Lysandros, in order to have a king with imperialist ideas like his own, had arranged the succession of Agesilaos, who was the brother of the dead king Agis, thereby excluding the latter's son, whose legitimacy was in doubt. Although himself the son of a king, and thereby able to claim descent from Herakles and from Zeus, Agesilaos – as our sources make clear – would not have displaced his rival without the influence and the cunning of Lysandros.

Historians have puzzled over Agesilaos, over the way Xenophon, our principal source, portrays him and over defects in the king's character. Modern scholars, Cartledge, Daverio-Rocchi, Schepens, and Tuplin, for instance, have made important progress in evaluating Xenophon's account of the king, in spite of an occasional tendency to perceive criticism lurking behind the eulogies. But we should remember that Xenophon spent more of his adult life with the Spartans than with the Athenians, and that his friendship for Agesilaos led him too often to undervalue the latter's opponents. The important question for us is not whether Agesilaos was a sympathetic character. It is clear that his courtesy, his apparent modesty, his rejection of sexual indulgence and of luxury, and his kindness to companions and relatives, won him loyal friends. His popularity was aided by the fact that in his youth, because not heir apparent, he had shared in the common education and served in the ranks of the army. It seems, however, that he suffered from three failings exceptionally damaging in a head of state. However bad the behaviour of his friends, at Sparta or elsewhere, he insisted on giving them political protection even if that meant making new enemies. Second, he would do anything to damage Thebes, even if that proved more damaging to Sparta itself. And finally, behind his attitude to Thebes and to others, lay a stubborn resentment of those who had offended him or his city. Our sources all agree in portraying him as obsessively vindictive towards Thebes. He was not, of course, sole king, but he succeeded in marginalizing his royal colleagues: king Pausanias, who seems to have preferred negotiation to armed force, was eventually convicted by a Spartan court and went into exile to escape a death sentence; king Kleombrotos, whose actions suggest that he was far from

wholehearted in leading an army against Boiotia, was obliged nevertheless to apply a policy he disapproved of, as Agesilaos himself became too old to lead many military operations in person.

Why was it that Spartan policy, at least until the defeat at Leuktra, coincided with the will of Agesilaos? We know that decisions to embark on wars were normally prepared by the ephors and voted on by the Spartan assembly, perhaps (though this is quite uncertain) after a preliminary vote by the *gerousia*.⁴⁰ Agesilaos is described by our sources as profoundly respectful of the ephors,⁴¹ and thus as winning their goodwill in turn. But this cannot fully answer our question. The ephors changed every year; it was the assembly which remained sovereign. Admittedly there is evidence of occasional angry opposition to Agesilaos among his fellow citizens. When he met such disapproval, as during the siege of Phleious (381–79), or the judicial decisions concerning Phoibidas and Sphodrias, or the expedition against Boiotia in 378, he moderated his policy, adopted a low profile or pleaded the higher interest of the Spartan community. But at no point do we hear that Agesilaos' policy was officially and clearly rejected, or that his critics formed a coherent opposition. Part of the reason for this, I believe, must be a spirit of solidarity among the *homoioi*, the aristocracy of the state made up of full citizens, the decision-makers who had shared so many activities with Agesilaos before he became king. In any case, we have to acknowledge that over the period of his reign the policy of Agesilaos and the policy of Sparta are indistinguishable.

The Spartans' reluctance to oppose authority may also have flowed in part from a necessary solidarity in the face of any conflict which might have threatened their power. The long years of war in defence of Sparta's empire had further damaged the economy and society of Sparta, already badly affected by the Peloponnesian War. The clearest sign of this is the collapse in the number of full citizens. In 371 Sparta's (male) citizen body amounted to no more than some 1200–1400, a figure which we calculate from the number of 700 present on the field at Leuktra. And of those 700, 400 were killed in the battle. It is all too clear why Agesilaos was unwilling to have the survivors treated as 'tremblers' in the Spartan way,⁴² a move which would have excluded them from the body of *homoioi*. This grave demographic situation was not only due to military losses. Expeditions to remote areas had involved only a few dozen Spartiates at a time, in many cases no more than thirty. The chief problems arose from the financial demands associated with the status of full citizen, as is well suggested by a chapter title in a work of Hodkinson (2000, ch. 13): 'Property concentration and the emergence of a plutocratic society'. From a combination of several factors (such as deaths in war, inheritance patterns, marriage between rich heirs and heiresses), landed property became concentrated in fewer and fewer hands, and yet the possession of a certain level of such property was a strict requirement for citizenship. A citizen was obliged to make regular contributions to his

syssition derived from the produce of his lands and higher than the level of his own consumption. Failing which, he was relegated to the category of ‘inferiors’, a sort of second-class citizen body. Kinadon had belonged to that category at the turn of the fifth and fourth centuries, and since then the number of such men had grown. They were not excluded from the army, but their existence undermined the solidarity of the citizen body which had – rightly or wrongly – been so admired by other Greeks. Some wealthy individuals did pay the educational expenses of impoverished youths; some also helped with voluntary contributions to the expenses of the *syssitia*. But such charity did not stop the process of large-scale impoverishment, indeed it tended to reduce many to the status of dependent clients – and thus deepened the divide between the small number of the wealthy and the mass of others.

Ordinary citizens, as we have seen, did not rally round to help Kinadon and his band of ‘inferiors’. When the Thebans invaded Laconia in 369, two further conspiracies occurred, according to Plutarch (*Ages.* 32. 6–11). One of these may have involved ‘inferiors’, whereas the other, which may well have aimed at changing Sparta’s government, was the work of Spartiates. Between the two plots there is no apparent link. In both cases the reaction of the authorities was swift, and those held responsible were put to death without trial. With the enemy at the gates, such immediate countermeasures were perhaps inevitable, but no attempt seems to have been made to understand the roots of these conspiracies, and Sparta’s social situation continued to deteriorate.

However, the Spartan state was compelled to call on the help of Lakedaimonians who were not Spartiates. Xenophon (*Hell.* 5. 3. 9) describes the troops which accompanied Agesipolis’ expedition against Olynthos in 380 as follows: they included volunteers from the *perioikoi* who were ‘fine men of good social standing’ (*kaloí kagathoi*), foreigners known as *trophimoi* (who had been educated at Sparta), and illegitimate sons of Spartiates, ‘fine-looking men who shared Spartan values’ (*ta en tei polei kala*). Would Sparta admit such men to its citizenship? No, not at this period. It is noteworthy too that the large numbers of freed helots known as *neodamōdeis*, who had in previous decades formed the majority of Lakedaimonian troops on expeditions abroad, are not referred to again in our sources after 369.⁴³ When these men were not on campaign, they were settled as garrison troops on Sparta’s northern borders, at Oion for example. The explanation is perhaps that, once military needs became less with the passing of Sparta’s empire, no more such *neodamōdeis* were created. Existing *neodamōdeis* or their descendants may have become part of the second-class *damos*, just possibly entitled to attend the assembly, but more or less excluded from holding office and entirely excluded from the status of landowner. As the number of *homoioi* eligible to marry had declined so steeply, we may speculate whether some citizen women – heiresses, orphans or widows – married ‘inferiors’ and thereby caused them to be promoted to the ranks of full citizens.

12.5 Conclusion

After the fall of Athens, Sparta became fanatically imperialist. There was an outburst of dynamism and a new openness to the world beyond her borders. Admittedly, Sparta had in the past played an important role in the Aegean and in the western Mediterranean, but such times seemed remote. From now on everything seemed possible. There were no more rivals within Greece, and further afield Sparta now learned to engage with the only other great power, Persia. In her new confidence, Sparta even managed to underestimate how potent the Persian empire remained. But the Spartans, by tradition uninterested in maritime traffic, neglected to establish security at sea, something which had been a major asset for the Athenian empire. More seriously still, Sparta disregarded the demand for ‘freedom’ made by the states which had – rallied by promises of freedom – helped her to destroy the Athenian empire. Sparta’s tendency to rely on small factions in the states of her empire meant that she could not rely on the support of the *dēmos* in the various cities; instead, internal conflicts were all too common. Even in Sicily, where Sparta posed as the successor to Corinth in her relations with Syracuse, her dogged support for the tyrant Dionysios meant that she was at odds with the majority of Syracusans who had counted on Sparta to restore their lost ‘freedom’ (Diod. Sic. 14. 69–70).

In spite of all this, an impressive number of allies stayed faithful to their Spartan *hēgemōn* over many years, some of them to the bitter end. We may never know how far this loyalty was due to traditional links, to the excellence of Spartan soldiers, to the fear of reprisals – or to the ambition to be part of a great, imperial adventure. The smaller city states had learned to their cost that total independence was an impossible dream: as one great power fell, there was always another to take its place. Sparta, for all its faults, may have seemed a better alternative than Thebes, for example. We should remember too that when our sources speak of support for Sparta from communities such as ‘the Achaians’ or ‘the Sikyonians’, this is shorthand for the ruling group in those states. What the majority of their citizens thought of Sparta we are not told.

These thirty years of Sparta’s empire are presented by ancient authors, and especially by Xenophon, as a tragic drama. The gods had issued their warnings, in the form of military defeats, of catastrophic losses and of defections among allies. But still humans persisted in their stubbornness, led by a man who subordinated all policy to the need to destroy one chosen enemy, Thebes, and to reduce to obedience all who opposed Spartan policy. Xenophon was right to see Agesilaos as the pure product of the Spartan education system as described by himself in the *Lakedaimonion Politeia*. That

education existed to instil competitiveness, an acute sense of personal status and a sense of superiority allied with mistrust of strangers (Plato, *Protagoras* 342c). The Spartans were thus poorly prepared to be imperialists, and to understand how others might view the world differently from themselves.

ABBREVIATIONS

FGrH:

Jacoby F., *Die Fragmente der Griechischen Historiker*, 1923–1959.

HO:

Hellenika Oxyrhynchia, ed. by M. Chambers. Stuttgart. 1993.

MK:

Hellenika Oxyrhynchia, ed. and trans. P.R. McKechnie and S.J. Kern. Warminster. 1988.

RO:

P.J. Rhodes and R. Osborne, *Greek Historical Inscriptions 404–323 BC*. Oxford. 2003.

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NOTES

- 1 Xenophon's *Agesilaos* is of little value here, being mainly a panegyric of the king.
- 2 Schepens (1993).
- 3 Humble (2004).
- 4 Scholars are now agreed on identifying its author as Kratippos of Athens, who undertook to continue the work of Thucydides: cf. M. Chambers, *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia*, Leipzig (Teubner), 1993; Schepens (1993), 174–

84. There is a recent tendency to dispute the accuracy of detail in this work, and to contrast it unfavourably with Xenophon: e.g. Buckler (2004).
- 5 Cf. Jacquemin (2000), no. 322, with bibliography. The significance of the monument is emphasized by the following lines of Ion of Samos which are inscribed upon it: ‘... Lysandros, who has crowned Sparta the indestructible, the akropolis of Greece ...’.
- 6 According to Pausanias (3.5.2), the other king, Agis, and 14 of the 28 *gerontes* voted against him.
- 7 For example, Hamilton (1970, 305–14) sees Pausanias as a proponent of restricting Spartan power to the Peloponnese, Agis as championing a limited imperialism on the Greek mainland and Lysandros as a believer in all-out imperialism. See Schepens (1993).
- 8 Hodkinson (2000), 90–4.
- 9 Plut., *Lys.* 16.1–2; Diod. Sic. 13.106, 8–9. According to Plut. *Nicias* 28.4, 1000 talents, of which thirty were stolen, i.e. about 780 kg; Diodorus (loc. cit.) gives 1500 T of which 300 were stolen. I myself find it hard to imagine that Gylippos, previously Sparta’s expeditionary commander in Sicily, did not know about these *skytalai*. More likely Gylippos was the victim of a trap aimed at discrediting him, since his reputation was a challenge to that of Lysandros. Such a trap would be made more plausible by the fact that Gylippos’ father had, in the mid-440s, been convicted at Sparta of accepting bribes from Perikles not to invade Attike (Diod. Sic. 13.106.10).
- 10 We cannot be sure of the exact dates of Thorax’ execution and of the law on coinage. It is possible that Thorax was a victim of this law, and even that he had not – as a commander returning from abroad – been aware of its existence. Cf. Hodkinson (2000), 172. Cataldi (1996), 69–76 sees the controversy about coinage as evidence of Sparta’s social conservatism.
- 11 David (1979/80); Figueira (2002); Christien (2002).
- 12 However, a text from the very early fourth century, attributed to Plato, states, ‘Nowhere in Greece is there as much gold and silver as there is, in private ownership, at Sparta’ (*Alkibiades* I, 122 e). A dialogue from the 360s, the *Hippias Major* (283d–e), paints a similar picture.
- 13 Ruzé (1997), 182–3.
- 14 Christien (1974); MacDowell (1986), 99–110; Hodkinson (2000) esp. 90–4, following Schütrumpf (1987). For a legal viewpoint, see Avramovic (2005) and the response of Todd (2005).

- 15 Here I share the view of Figueira (2006), 59–60 – unless Kinadon was of illegitimate birth and his father had arranged for him to be included in the common education of young Spartiates.
- 16 Westlake (1986), Briant (1996).
- 17 Xen. *Anab.* 1.1.9. Plutarch, in describing Klearchos as given an official mission, uses the same terms (*Artaxerxes* 6.5) as Xenophon had used in the case of Samios (*Hell.* 3.1.1). Simple error should be suspected. Only Diodorus (14. 12) portrays Klearchos as an appalling tyrant, quite likely confusing him with the tyrant of the same name who later ruled Herakleia-in-Pontos (363/2–351/0; Justin 16) and extrapolating from Xenophon’s picture (*Anab.* esp. 2.6.1–15) of Klearchos as an exacting, cruel but highly competent commander.
- 18 *Hell.* 3.1.3–2.20; Diod. Sic. 14.35–37.4; 38.2–3; 38.6–39; Plut., *Artaxerxes* 20.
- 19 Xenophon (*Hell.* 3.4.2–3) may seem confused: he mentions an assembly of the allies but describes the decision as being made by the Spartans alone. But, as A. Powell has reminded me, Thucydides ascribed the same structure to Sparta’s deliberation with allies in 432 (1.67–87).
- 20 *Hell.* 3.4.3–28; *HO* 14–15; 24–25; Diod. Sic. 14.79–80; Plut., *Ages.* 7–14; *Lys.* 23; Paus. 3, 9.
- 21 Cartledge (1987), 358: ‘the turning-point not just of Sparta’s Asiatic venture but also of Sparta’s imperial progress on the mainland’.
- 22 Cf. Briant (1996), 631–64, esp. 661–2.
- 23 Schepens (2004b) for a good comparison of the sources (*Hell.* 3.2.21–31; Diod. Sic. 14.17.4–13; 34.1; Paus. 3.8.3–5); on the geography of the region Roy (1999, 2004) and (1998) on the origins of the dispute.
- 24 Herakleia-in-Trachis, just north of Thermopylai, was founded in 426 by Sparta at the request of Doris and Trachis: the colony, for which recruits were sought from a wide area, was intended to act as a base for action against Euboia and as a staging-post towards the North (Thuc. 3. 92–3). However, it was ceaselessly attacked by the Thessalians and was badly administered by Spartan officials, who in many cases behaved savagely. It declined as a result, and for a while fell into the control of Boiotians (in 419/8, according to Thuc. 5.52). Captured finally in 395/4 by Boiotia and Argos it was handed back to the control of Trachis (Diod. Sic. 14.82.6–7).
- 25 The argument of Buckler (2004), against the account given by the Oxyrhynchus Historian, I find unconvincing, even though he may be right in placing these events within Opuntian Lokris.

- 26 See Tuplin (1993) for a detailed study of the Corinthian War and of Xenophon's account of it.
- 27 Diodorus (14.89) and Pausanias (3.5.6) described him as tried by the *politai* (his fellow citizens). Agesilaos may have played a key role in his condemnation; see Cataldi (1996, 77). But subsequently as ex-king Pausanias directed his wrath against the ephors, if it is true that the 'pamphlet' which he composed in exile represented their power as 'usurped' because not authorized by Lykourgos (See Nafissi, [Chapter 4](#) this volume).
- 28 Carità (2004): no divinity would protect all slaughterers who took refuge in its sanctuary, especially when the slaughter in question occurred during a festival.
- 29 Cf. Gillone (2004).
- 30 *Hell.* 4.4.15; 5.2, 8–10; 3.10–25 *passim*. Cf. Daverio-Rocchi (2004) and Luppino-Manes (1991).
- 31 Diod. Sic. 15.20.2, suggesting that Phoibidas was merely following the secret instructions given to commanders.
- 32 *Hell.* 5.4.1; cf. Diod. Sic. 15.19.4 and 20.2; Polybios 4.27.4; Plut. *Ages.* 23.3; Justin 8.1.5.
- 33 Diod. Sic. 15.27.3 states that two commanders of the garrison were executed, and the third condemned to pay an impossibly large fine.
- 34 This would make more plausible the report that Sphodrias during his trial received the backing of Kleombrotos, in addition to that of Agesilaos whose son was the lover of Sphodrias' son (*Hell.* 5.4.25–33).
- 35 Diod. Sic. 15.40, and see Roy (1973).
- 36 Kerkyra perhaps joined the Athenian Confederacy at this point: Tod 127 with the commentary of Rhodes-Osborne, 112–13.
- 37 As illustrated by the anecdote concerning Prothoos: *Hell.* 6.4.2–3.
- 38 Agesilaos arranged that the survivors should not be subject to the law against 'tremblers', according to Plutarch (*Ages.* 30.2–6; *Mor.* 191c and 214a); see Ducat (2006).
- 39 Aeneas Tacticus 11.7–10; Diod. Sic. 15.57–8; cf Ruzé (2010).
- 40 On the role of different political bodies, see e.g. Ruzé (1997) and Ruzé-Christien (2007).
- 41 See Schepens (2005) for an analysis of sources concerning his personality.

42 'Tremblers' (*tresantes*), systematically humiliated in social life, were those Spartans who had fled from the enemy, surrendered, or simply survived a battle when all their fellows had not. See Ducat (2006).

43 Cf. Ruzé (1993).

CHAPTER 13

Sparta and the Peloponnese from the Archaic Period to 362 BC

James Roy

13.1 The Peloponnese

The name ‘Peloponnese’ does not appear in Homer: the name, as one word or two (*Pelopos nēsos*), is found for the first time in the archaic period (Purcell 2012), in the *Cypria* (fr. 9 Kinkel; part of the so-called *Epic Cycle*) and in the *Homeric Hymns* 2.73 (to Apollo). There is no reason to think that at that time the inhabitants of the Peloponnese felt any strong common identity or that the Peloponnese itself was seen as a political focus, in contrast to the interests of the various states that made it up. Yet by the second half of the fifth century ‘the Peloponnesians’ is commonly found in literary texts, and the interests of the Peloponnese are a political issue.¹

In a debate at Sparta shortly before the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War, the Corinthians told Sparta’s Peloponnesian allies that the Athenians were harming the Peloponnese (Thuc. 1.67.1), and the ephor Sthenelaïdas said to the Spartans that the Athenians did not deny that they were harming ‘our allies and the Peloponnese’ (Thuc. 1.86.1). Speaking before representatives of the Peloponnesian allies, the Corinthians told the Spartans to try not to make the Peloponnese less than their fathers had handed it down to them (Thuc. 1.71.7), and King Archidamos told the Spartans to take care that their action should not bring more shame and difficulty on the Peloponnese (Thuc. 1.82.5). The Peloponnese mentioned in these statements is vaguely defined – did it include Argos? – but it is clear that Sparta and Sparta’s Peloponnesian allies could talk in terms of a shared concept of the Peloponnese, or at least that Thucydides believed so. Such thinking persisted in the fourth century. In the 360s, after the Arkadian Confederacy split into two blocs, Xenophon (*Hell.* 7.5.1) describes the pro-Spartan bloc as the Mantineians and ‘of the other Arkadians, those who care for the Peloponnese’; and (*Hell.* 7.5.3) he has the *eparittoi* (the standing army of the Arkadian Confederacy, now pro-Spartan and hostile to Thebes) send ambassadors to ask whether the Spartans are willing to join in opposing anyone who comes to enslave the Peloponnese.

Also, by the 430s ‘the Peloponnesians’ had become a common usage. The two blocs that from 431 fought out the long and bitter Peloponnesian War were now known to Greeks as the ‘Athenians’ and the ‘Peloponnesians’. Already

Herodotus speaks of ‘the war of the Peloponnesians and the Athenians’ (7.137, cf. 9.73), and Thucydides writes in the same terms (1.1.1, cf. 1.23.4, etc.). Thucydides very frequently uses ‘Peloponnesians’ to describe the pro-Spartan side in the Peloponnesian War, sometimes distinguishing different groups and sometimes not. ‘Peloponnesians’ could mean both the Spartans and their allies: at Thuc. 8.57.2 Tissaphernes sent for ‘the Peloponnesians’ and concluded a treaty with them, but the text of the treaty itself (8.58.1–7) refers to the ‘Lakedaimonians and the allies’. The ‘Peloponnesians’ could be only those actually from the Peloponnese as opposed to Sparta’s allies farther afield: at Thuc. 2.11.1 Archidamos addresses ‘Peloponnesians and allies’, referring separately to the two groups of Sparta’s allies. However ‘Peloponnesians’ could even include those from outside the Peloponnese who fought with Sparta in the war: at Thuc. 8.104.1–106.3 a fleet is described several times as Peloponnesian, but the ships that it eventually lost to the Athenians came from Chios, Ambrakia, Boiotia, Leukas, and Syracuse, as well as from Sparta and other parts of the Peloponnese. Sparta’s network of alliances in the Peloponnese was clearly thought of by Greeks as so important that it could give its name to the whole body of Greeks fighting on the Spartan side, Spartans, other Peloponnesians, and non-Peloponnesians.

The evolution from the sixth century onwards of the concepts of ‘Peloponnese’ and ‘Peloponnesians’ was largely due, directly or indirectly, to growth of Spartan power in the Peloponnese, in other words to the development of – to use a modern term – the Peloponnesian League. The use of the term ‘Peloponnesian’ for Spartan allies outside the Peloponnese shows that Spartan ambition and influence extended well beyond the Peloponnese itself, but a strong network of alliances within the Peloponnese was at the core of Sparta’s strength in the Greek world and the dissolution of these alliances in the 360s seriously diminished Spartan power.

13.2 The Beginning of the Peloponnesian League

Kroisos learnt then that at this time the Athenians were in such a plight, but that the Lakedaimonians had escaped from great misfortunes and now had the upper hand over the Tegeans in their war. For in the kingship of Leon and Hegesikles at Sparta the Lakedaimonians were successful in the other wars but failed against the Tegeans alone.

So Herodotus begins an account (1.65–8) of the condition of Sparta in the middle of the sixth century to explain why Kroisos king of Lydia formed an

alliance with Sparta (1.69–70) and not with Athens (whose current problems he reviewed at 1.59–64). Sparta's eventual victory over Tegea is commonly seen as the beginning of the Peloponnesian League, and from the second half of the sixth century until its dissolution in the 360s the Peloponnesian League helped to maintain Sparta's position as one of the two great powers of mainland Greece. Yet Herodotus' account leaves much unclear. The approximate date is clear enough: Sparta failed against Tegea under the kings Leon and Hegesikles (c.575–560) but succeeded under Anaxandridas and Ariston at a date before Kroisos was defeated and overthrown by Persia c.546. Tegea was Sparta's immediate neighbour to the north, and by defeating Tegea Sparta overcame a major obstacle to the northward expansion of Spartan influence in the Peloponnese. Yet Herodotus wrote of other, evidently successful, wars under Leon and Hegesikles without saying against whom the Spartans had fought. Moreover he ends his account of Sparta in the mid-sixth century with the words (1.68):

From this time, whenever they [i.e. Lakedaimonians and Tegeans] struggled against each other, the Lakedaimonians were much superior in the war, and already the greater part of the Peloponnese was subordinate to them.

Subsequent history shows that Argos and Achaia were not then subordinate to Sparta, and it would be surprising if all the other Arkadians had accepted Spartan supremacy while Tegea was successfully resisting Spartan attacks. Conceivably Sparta might have reached agreements with states beyond Tegea before achieving final victory over the Tegeans, and certainly before the middle of the sixth century Sparta had been involved at least occasionally in areas of the Peloponnese well north of Laconia and Messenia. Wars between Sparta and Argos for control of Thyreatis, the area on the east coast of the Peloponnese that lay between them, went back to the mid-seventh century, if not earlier, and, for instance, there is also clear archaeological evidence of close connections between Laconia and Halieis in the Argolid by the early sixth century. (On early Spartan activity in the Peloponnese down to the defeat of Tegea see Cartledge (2002) 118–23 and Pretzler (2008) 151–3.) Nonetheless the beginnings of the Peloponnesian League remain obscure. One thing however seems clear. Spartan expansion in Laconia and Messenia had made these territories a patchwork of Spartan territory worked by a dependent helot labour-force and perioikic communities inhabited by Lakedaimonians for whom military and foreign policy was determined by Sparta. (See [Chapter 22](#) by Figueira and [Chapter 23](#) by Ducat in this work.) However, after defeating Tegea Sparta did not bring it too under direct Spartan control, but instead made a treaty with the Tegeans. Eventually through a series of such treaties the Peloponnesian League was built up.

Aristotle (fr. 592 Rose) recorded a treaty between Sparta and Tegea that obliged the Tegeans 'to expel the Messenians, and that it be not permitted to

make them *khrestous*'. Several aspects of the treaty have been much debated, including the meaning of 'make *khrestous*', which may well mean to give the status of citizen. The treaty clearly belongs after Sparta's defeat of Tegea, and attempts have been made to see it as the original treaty between Sparta and Tegea, or at least to date it to the same period. However what survives of Aristotle's text offers no date, and the treaty may well fit better in the early fifth century, when Sparta was concerned about the Messenian helots (Cawkwell (1993) 368–70, cf. Braun 1994). In that case it does not enlighten us about the early development of the Peloponnesian League.

The two clearest indicators of the League's early development are the Spartan expedition to Samos c.525 and the Spartan campaigns in Attike after the overthrow of the Athenian tyrant Hippias. In the campaign against the tyrant Polykrates in Samos (Hdt. 3.46–56) the Spartans were helped by the Corinthians (but by no other ally), and it is likely that the Corinthians were by then allied to Sparta. Later, around 512, a Spartan expedition to Athens tried unsuccessfully to remove Hippias, and then, in 510, a second Spartan expedition succeeded (Hdt. 5.62–5). There followed political tension in Athens between two groups led by Isagoras and Kleisthenes, whose reforms c.508 are often seen as establishing the first democratic constitution in Athens. Around 508 the Spartan king Kleomenes went to Athens with a small force to support Isagoras: Kleisthenes was forced into a brief exile, but Kleomenes was obliged to leave Attike (Hdt. 5.70–2). Then c.506 Sparta sent another, much bigger, force to Athens. It was commanded by both Spartan kings, Kleomenes and Damaratos, though Herodotus' account (5.74–6) gives Kleomenes more prominence.

Kleomenes ... gathered an army from the whole Peloponnese, not declaring for what purpose he was gathering it, and wanting to take vengeance on the Athenian people and to make Isagoras tyrant.

As the Spartans and their allies were moving towards a battle with the Athenian forces, the Corinthians raised objections:

The Corinthians first said among themselves that they were not doing what was right, and changed their minds and departed.

Thereupon King Damaratos also left the expedition, and so too did Sparta's other allies. Kleomenes was obliged to withdraw ignominiously.

This final expedition against Athens shows two things. First, Sparta now had numerous allies in the Peloponnese, though certainly not 'the whole Peloponnese' since Argos and Achaia were not allied to Sparta. (However this is the only known occasion before the Persian Wars on which Sparta called on a large number of Peloponnesian allies: see Yates (2005) 66–7.) Second, Sparta could not operate without the consent of its allies, or at least the powerful and influential states among the allies such as Corinth. When, a few

years later, the Spartans contemplated another intervention in Athens to restore Hippias as tyrant, they summoned representatives from all their allies to Sparta and the project was discussed. The Corinthians spoke out vigorously against it, and against any support for tyranny, and the project was dropped (Hdt. 5.91–4). Although there is no indication that a procedure had evolved which was necessarily to be followed in future – a meeting convened by Sparta to discuss a project proposed by Sparta which the allies could debate and, if they chose, reject – Sparta’s network of allies had found a method by which the varying interests of Sparta and the allies could be resolved. Whether the network was woven tight enough to merit at this time the (modern) name of ‘Peloponnesian League’ is disputed.

13.3 The Peloponnese in the Sixth Century

The expansion of Spartan influence was far from being the only major development in the sixth-century Peloponnese, and Sparta was by no means the only state with ambitions. (There is a general review of the archaic Peloponnese other than Laconia and Messenia in Nielsen and Roy 2009, and the main developments in individual communities are presented in the relevant entries in Hansen and Nielsen 2004.) The Peloponnesians at that time had no sense of unity: a common Peloponnesian identity eventually developed – so far as it did – as the result of cooperation with Sparta and with each other as allies of Sparta. Until then different communities pursued their own interests, often in conflict with each other.

By the mid-sixth century Corinth was important politically, militarily, and economically (see Salmon 1984). It held a large territory in the northeast Peloponnese, adjacent to the Isthmos, with ports on both sides of the Isthmos. In the later sixth century, out of Sparta’s Peloponnesian allies Corinth was the best able to disagree openly with Sparta over policy. West of Corinth Sikyon too held a stable and united territory, despite various changes of political regime. These were the only two regions of the Peloponnese united in a single state, unless Megara, lying north of Corinth on the Isthmos, is to be reckoned as Peloponnesian.

Elsewhere regions contained several communities, which interacted in various ways. In the Argolid, mountains divided the plain near Argos from the communities of the Akte, nearer the Saronic Gulf. Argos, already a strong state, sought to bring under its control the other communities of the Argive plain, and also Thyreatis, the area on the east coast of the Peloponnese between the Argolid and Laconia. How fast Argos was able to extend its territory is not entirely clear (see Hall 1995, and Piérart 1997 and 2003). In the contest for Thyreatis Argos was supposedly defeated by Sparta in a battle at Hysiai, traditionally dated to 669, but reported only by Pausanias (2.24.7).

It is, however, clear from a fragment of Tyrtaios (*P.Oxy.* 3316) that there was fighting between Argos and Sparta in the mid-seventh century. In the 540s Argos seems to have been defeated in the 'Battle of the Champions' (Hdt. 1.82; see Franchi 2008), and later Argos was very heavily defeated at Sepeia in 494 (Hdt. 6.76–83, 92; 7.148). Then in 451 Argos agreed to a thirty-year truce with Sparta, which was respected (Thuc. 5.14.4). Nonetheless, despite moments of weakness, Argos remained outside the network of Spartan alliances, and, when circumstances allowed, constituted a threat to Sparta. The small states Kleonai and Phleious lay between Corinth and Argos, and protected themselves as best they could against their more powerful neighbours (Piérart (2004) 610–11 and 613–14).

In the central Peloponnese already in the archaic period the Arkadians had a sense of ethnic unity but no political union. (See Nielsen (2002) 89–112 on the extent of archaic Arkadia.) The region contained many distinct communities, large and small, and so gave scope for a wide range of interactions. In southeastern Arkadia Tegea, Sparta's northern neighbour, had ambitions in the later archaic period (Pretzler 2008), and it clearly cost Sparta a prolonged effort to establish influence over it. Mantinea, immediately north of Tegea, probably also sought to develop its power. Smaller communities near these two had thus to come to terms with the growing influence of Mantinea, Tegea, and Sparta. In southwestern Arkadia the Parrhasians, a group of small communities which acted together, appear already in Homer (*Iliad* 2.608), but the Mainalians may have come together to form a similar group under pressure from their bigger neighbours (Nielsen (1996) 143). Other communities in the borderlands between Arkadia and Laconia may have preferred to join the Spartans as perioikoi (Roy 2009a; cf. Nafissi (2009) 123–4 on the varying origins of perioikic dependence).

When the various Achaian communities on the north coast of the Peloponnese developed a common identity is disputed (see Hall and Morgan 1996, Hall (2002) 58–65, and Arena 2006–7). In any case they do not appear to have played a significant part in Peloponnesian inter-state politics in the later archaic period, and were not involved in Sparta's network of alliances until later. Pellene was already allied to Sparta at the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War in 431, and the other Achaians formed alliances with Sparta during the war (Thuc. 2.9.2).

In the western Peloponnese the Eleans were extending their control southwards from the valley of the River Peneios, their original home. Ancient sources report – with major differences in detail – conflict between Elis and Pisatis for control of Olympia, but several recent studies have produced strong arguments that these reports are unhistorical (Nafissi 2001 and 2003, Möller 2004, Gehrke 2003, Giangiulio 2009).² If we disregard the supposed Elean–Pisatan conflict, we have no literary basis for reconstructing early Elean history, but the publication of Elean inscriptions at Olympia from the middle

of the sixth century suggests that by then – if not before – the Eleans controlled the sanctuary. Olympia in the mid-sixth century was of enormous importance to the Greek world, as the known dedications show, and particularly to Peloponnesians and western Greeks (see e.g. Scott (2010) 146–80, but note that he accepts without argument an early Pisatan state), and so Elis, once in control of Olympia, was in contact with many parts of the Greek world. It is also clear that, as Elean power grew, the Eleans incorporated some neighbouring communities directly into the Elean state but reduced others to the condition of subordinate allies (Roy 1997 and 2009b). Elean expansion continued in the fifth century: they were fighting south of the River Alpheios in Herodotus' day (Hdt. 4.148). Sparta's connections with Olympia in the sixth century are clear, for instance from the engraved seat at Olympia of Gorgos, Spartan proxenos (Siewert and Taeuber 2013, no. 49, c.575–550 BC), but when Elis and Sparta became allies is less clear. Elis may have been one of Sparta's earliest allies in the Peloponnese (Tausend (1992) 167), but there is no direct evidence of such an alliance before the Persian Wars, in which the Eleans fought alongside the Spartans (Hdt. 8.72, 9.77.3; Paus. 5.4.7). Elis' power in the western Peloponnese began to worry the Spartans in the 420s, but we do not hear of any earlier conflict between Elis and Sparta.

If Sparta wanted to be the dominant influence in the Peloponnese, it thus had to deal with a considerable number of Peloponnesian states, some of them powerful in their own right, though equally local tensions could make some Peloponnesian states willing to accept an alliance with the increasingly powerful Spartans. Nonetheless Sparta, even if stronger than any other single state in the Peloponnese, did not dominate its allies numerically: cohesion in the Peloponnesian League had to be maintained by skilful management, and on several occasions in the fifth and earlier-fourth centuries Sparta had to face very serious threats to its predominance. It was also true that the Peloponnesian League was never organized to generate a secure flow of funds from the member-states to Sparta (unlike the Athenian alliance of the fifth century), and for expensive ventures – such as major naval ventures – some other source of funding was needed (such as Persian help in the later fifth century). A surviving inscription, probably dating from the time of the Peloponnesian War, lists 'a most eclectic range of contributions' to the Spartan war fund, and vividly illustrates the uncertain nature of Sparta's financial resources (discussed by e.g. Hodkinson (2000) 168–9: the phrase quoted is on p. 169). Another consequence of the Peloponnesian League's development was that Sparta's Peloponnesian allies came into frequent contact not only with Sparta but also each other, which facilitated joint action by combinations of states, not always in Sparta's interests (Pretzler 2007).

Sparta had the advantage of being constitutionally stable from the archaic period onwards until the third century BC, maintaining its own peculiar form of oligarchy. It was therefore a natural ally of oligarchs elsewhere, and Sparta

acquired the reputation of being generally a support of oligarchic regimes (e.g. Thuc. 3.82.1: see de Ste. Croix (1981) 288). This did not however mean that Sparta's Peloponnesian allies were compelled to be uniformly oligarchic. One supposed factor in Sparta's policy towards other states has probably been over-stated, namely a desire to get rid of tyrants. Thucydides (1.18.1) says that Sparta itself had never been ruled by a tyrant, which is true, and that most tyrannies in Greece, other than Sicily, were removed by the Spartans, which is much more problematic. The Spartans certainly acted – unsuccessfully – against Polykrates in Samos, and helped remove Hippias from power in Athens, but even at Athens they contemplated restoring Hippias to power. In a recent study of Greek tyranny Lewis ((2009) 46–7) casts considerable doubt on any general Spartan policy of opposing tyranny at the time when they were developing their network of allies in the Peloponnese.

It is worth noting the relics that the Spartans brought home from elsewhere in the Peloponnese. Before defeating Tegea in the mid-sixth century Sparta took from Tegea the supposed bones of Orestes (Hdt. 1.67–8), and then, at a date difficult to specify but probably later, the bones of Teisamenos son of Orestes were brought from Helike in Achaia to Sparta (Paus. 7.1.7–8). Other states also moved similar relics: this was not a purely Spartan policy with a precise Spartan purpose, but the Spartans clearly believed that the possession of such relics increased their influence in the Peloponnese. (See the discussions by Leahy 1955, McCauley 1999, and Phillips 2003.) Sparta, obviously Dorian, may have hoped to link non-Dorian areas (Arkadia, Achaia) to itself, but there is no evidence for such a development (Pretzler 2007). However, possession of the relics would in itself give the Spartans prestige, and possibly boost their confidence.

Finally it is also worth noting that probably in the seventh and sixth centuries a considerable number of wagon-roads was built in the Peloponnese, and many of these ran from one city-state's territory to another. The construction, operation and upkeep of these roads will have required cooperation between communities, and so will have been a political as well as a practical matter. We know about these roads especially from the work of Pikoulas (see Pikoulas 1995, 1999, 2012) and of Christien (this work, Vol. 2, [Ch. 24](#)). Whether the roads were originally built largely for military reasons, as Pikoulas has suggested, or whether they were intended to facilitate the movement of building materials as Forsén proposed (Forsén and Forsén 2003, 63–75), is not yet clear. Nonetheless they will certainly have made transport across the Peloponnese, for both military and non-military purposes, much easier. Road construction continued into the classical period and beyond (and of course was not confined to the Peloponnese).

13.4 Non-Political Contacts Between Sparta and the Rest of the Peloponnese

Not all of Sparta's contacts with the other Peloponnesians were politico-military. There must have been commercial contacts, though they have not attracted much scholarly attention. There was certainly production and trade in Laconia (see [Chapter 3](#) by Cavanagh, [Chapter 5](#) by Pipili and [Chapter 6](#) by Prost in this volume). The pioneering study of trade in Laconian mixing bowls by Nafissi (in Stibbe 1989) points out that 'the presence of Laconian kraters outside both Laconia and the major Panhellenic sanctuaries should be seen as resulting from mercantile activity', and shows what could be done on other Laconian products in pottery and bronze, the materials most likely to survive archaeologically. Stibbe's work on Laconian transport amphorai gives some indication of how they travelled ((2000) 70–2 and 163–7), as do Pipili's studies of the clients of Laconian black-figure vases (2006, and [Chapter 5](#) this volume). It is evident too that in the late archaic period Laconia produced a distinct style of small bronzes, which have been found elsewhere, notably at Olympia, and clearly influenced styles in neighbouring regions of the Peloponnese (Stibbe 2007). Nonetheless it is not yet possible to give any overall view of commercial exchanges between Laconia and the rest of the Peloponnese.

There were also personal contacts. Leading men in other communities often had ties of *xenia* (guest-friendship) with members of the Spartiate elite, relationships that no doubt combined personal contacts with opportunities for political discussion. Cartledge ((1987) 242–6), has discussed the significance of such connections, and Hodkinson ((2000) 337–52) has taken the topic further, tabulating the known cases, which include friendships with Spartan kings. Such contacts could be easily maintained: for instance, Spartiates entertained Greek guests from elsewhere who came to Sparta to see the spectacular festival of the Gymnopaïdai, and in the second half of the fifth century the wealthy Spartiate Lichas was famous for such hospitality (Xen. *Mem.* 1.2.61, Plut. *Kimon* 10.6).

Such contacts could be formalized, and we know of Spartans who acted as *proxenos* of another Greek state, and likewise of Greeks from elsewhere who were *proxenoi* of Sparta (Hodkinson (2000) 340). The earliest known case is Gorgos, Spartan *proxenos* at Elis (or Olympia) c.575–550 (Siewert and Taeuber (2013) no. 49). In the sixth century at least it is likely that men who became *proxenos* were already friends of one or more leading citizens in the state concerned.

An Elean inscription of c.475–50 mentions an Elean *epiwoikia* at Sparta (and another on Euboia) (Siewert and Taeuber (2013) no. 5A). The word should mean something like 'colony', and so the text suggests that some Eleans were resident at Sparta, but there is no further information.

Spartans also went to the great Greek sanctuaries, made dedications there and took part in the athletic competitions. At Olympia has been found an inscribed cauldron, dedicated by the Spartans in the sixth century BC (Siewert (1991) no. 1), but the Spartan winners at the Olympic Games have attracted more attention. According to the recorded dates ‘there are what might be described as an alarming number of Spartan victors in the early parts of the Olympic victor list. Spartans represent well over half the known Olympic victors from the period between 720 and 576...’ (Christesen (2007) 159). In the most recent analysis of the Olympic victor-list Christesen makes a good case for believing that there was no such list until Hippias of Elis compiled one *c.*400. Hippias therefore had to identify victors and assign dates to them as best he could, and probably with little precise evidence particularly for the period before the sixth century. It is therefore very likely that early dates in the lists are unreliable, and Christesen even suggests that Hippias may have filled gaps in the early part of his list by inserting Spartan names (Christesen (2007) 45–160, especially 159–60). There is no reason to doubt that many Spartans took part in the Games, but in the earlier archaic period it hard to know exactly how many, and when. (On such chronological problems see also Shaw 2003.)

13.5 From the 480s to the 430s

When the Spartans marched out, too late, to help the Athenians against the Persian invasion of Attike in 490, probably no Peloponnesian allies went with them. From 481 onwards, however, the Spartans and their Peloponnesian allies joined the other Greeks who planned to oppose the second Persian invasion. In 480 ships from Sparta and other Peloponnesian cities were in the Greek fleet at Salamis (Hdt. 8.43), and the land forces of all Arkadia, Elis, Corinth, Sikyon, Epidauros, Phleious, Troizen, and Hermione joined the Spartans at the Isthmos (Hdt. 8.72). In 479 Peloponnesian allies sent troops to the campaign against Mardonios that led to the Battle of Plataia, but apparently not all (Hdt. 9.28). Of the Arkadians, for instance, only the Tegeans and Orchomenians were present: the Mantineians arrived late, after the battle (Hdt. 9.77), and there is no mention of other Arkadians: only the Tegeans and Orchomenians figured on the Serpent-Column that the Greeks dedicated at Delphi to commemorate their victory (Meiggs and Lewis (1988) no. 27; Lupi, [Chapter 10](#), this volume).

When the Messenians revolted *c.*465, some allies helped Sparta, but perhaps not all. Plataia and Athens sent forces, but of the Peloponnesians only Aigina and Mantinea are known to have assisted the Spartans (Hornblower (1997) 158 on Thuc. 1.102.1; on the revolt see Luraghi (2008) 173–208.)

There followed the complex situation generally known as the ‘First Peloponnesian War’, lasting from 459 until Athens and Sparta made a thirty-year peace in 446/5. (On the events of this period see Lewis 1992, 96–120 and 121–46.) After the peace, however, distrust continued between Athens and Sparta, and Sparta’s Peloponnesian allies seem to have shared Sparta’s suspicion of Athens. In 440 Sparta and its Peloponnesian allies debated whether to help the Samians in their revolt against Athens, but finally decided not to, persuaded apparently by arguments from the Corinthians (Thuc. 1.40.5, 41.2). In the 430s, as tensions grew between Athens and Sparta, Thucydides reports at some length several meetings of Sparta and the allies. From the 460s onwards the Peloponnesian League seems to have become more cohesive, although that did not exclude disagreements over policy. Finally in 432 the allies met again at Sparta and, by a majority, voted to go to war against Athens (Thuc. 1.119–25):

When the Lakedaimonians had heard the opinion of all, they put the vote to all those allies who were present, both larger and smaller cities; and the majority voted to make war.

(Thuc. 1.125.1)

The ‘Athenians’ and the ‘Peloponnesians’ then fought out the Peloponnesian War.

13.6 Tensions Between Sparta and the Peloponnesian Allies

Although the ‘Peloponnesian League’ lasted from the later sixth century until the 360s, and its support helped make Sparta a major force in inter-state politics, the network of alliances was often troubled by internal problems. It is important to remember that the individual allied states had their own ambitions, and these could lead to tensions either between allied states or between an ally and Sparta. Sparta evidently saw no need to intervene to stop conflict, even war, between allies if there was no threat to Sparta’s interests. We know, for instance, of a series of victory-dedications by Arkadian states from the sixth century BC down into the fifth (the evidence is set out by Nielsen (2002) 130–3). The dedications show that in each case a war was fought to the point that one side could claim victory: e.g. at Delphi ‘The Kortynians a tithe from the enemy’ (*Syll.*³.49), set up by the small community of Gortys in central Arkadia, and certainly referring to war with neighbours. Yet we never hear of any attempt by Sparta to prevent or stop these wars. If, however, Sparta thought intervention necessary, then it could intervene, if need be with great force.

The first known occasion was when, in the late 490s, the Spartan king Kleomenes I attempted to win the support of leading Arkadians (Hdt. 6.74–5). Much about this episode is obscure, and Herodotus' report may well be based on information from Kleomenes' enemies: but there seems no doubt that Kleomenes was rapidly brought back to Laconia.

Later Herodotus (9.35) reports five victories won by the Spartans with the help of the seer Tisamenos:

Now the five victories were these: first, this victory at Plataia; and that at Tegea against the Tegeans and the Argives; and afterwards at Dipaia against all the Arkadians except the Mantineians; and next against the Messenians at Ithome; and finally at Tanagra against the Athenians and the Argives.

Herodotus' brief account of these major events leaves us with serious chronological problems (see Lewis (1992) 107–8), but it seems clear that in the 460s Sparta had to contend with a major challenge to its authority in Arkadia (and continued hostility from Argos). Overcoming this challenge needed not one but two victories in battle. (On Sparta's problems in the Peloponnese in the 470s and 460s see Powell in this volume, [Chapter 11.](#))

More trouble developed during the early part of the Peloponnesian War. There was frequently rivalry between Tegea and its northern neighbour Mantinea. During the war the two cities, with the support of the alliances that they had built up among their small Arkadian neighbours (Nielsen (2002) 366–7), fought a battle in 423, without resolving their conflict. In 421 BC, after the first phase of the Peloponnesian War had ended, the Spartan army marched in strength into southern Arkadia to destroy a fort that the Mantineians had built near the Spartan frontier and to free the Parrhasians of southwestern Arkadia from Mantineian domination (Thuc. 5.33).

There was also trouble with Elis, hitherto – so far as we know – friendly to Sparta (Thuc. 5.31.1–5, 34.1–2, 49.1–50.4; Roy 1998). Elean expansion southward had, before the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War, reached the River Neda, the northern frontier of Messenia. Lepreon, lying just north of the Neda, thus became a subordinate ally of Elis. During the War, however, the Lepreates appealed to the Spartans to adjudicate a quarrel between Lepreon and Elis, and the Spartans decided in favour of Lepreon. This led to a Spartan garrison in Lepreon, and an Elean claim that the Spartans had breached the Olympic Truce for the Games of 420. The Eleans banned the Spartans from competing, and when the Spartan Lichas nonetheless competed in the chariot-race the Elean officials at the Games beat him with their rods. Relations between Elis and Sparta were now bitterly hostile.

These problems with Mantinea and Elis became part of a major crisis in Sparta's network of Peloponnesian alliances. Both Athens and Sparta had by

421 reasons to make peace, and first a truce was arranged between the Athenians and the Spartans and their respective allies. However, some of Sparta's allies refused to accept its terms, and as a result Athens and Sparta then made an alliance for fifty years despite the objections of other states. (The main evidence for these events is in Thuc. 5.17.1–27.1, though his evidence can be complemented by other writers and by epigraphy.) The extreme discontent of some of Sparta's leading allies, notably Corinth, led to complex negotiations, complicated by the fact that Argos' thirty-year peace with Sparta had just ended, so that the Argives were free to act as they wished. The Argives decided to create an anti-Spartan alliance, and announced that they would accept as allies any Greeks who wished to join (Thuc. 5.28). The first to join were the Mantineians, followed by the Eleans (Thuc. 5.29, 31). According to Thucydides, a major crisis had developed in the Peloponnese with many of Sparta's allies considering switching to Argos' anti-Spartan alliance, and there was a real possibility that Corinth and allies in Boiotia would refuse to support Sparta (Thuc. 5.35–38). Athens became involved in the diplomatic manoeuvring, and eventually, without renouncing their fifty-year alliance, the Athenians made an alliance with Argos, Mantinea, and Elis. Tension was growing between Athens and Sparta, and while the Olympic Games were being held in 420 troops from Athens, Argos, and Mantinea were present to help the Eleans in case the Spartans, banned from competing by the Eleans, tried to force their way in (Thuc. 5.50.3). Corinth and Boiotia became more cautious, and did not oppose Sparta, but the situation in the Peloponnese deteriorated until the Spartans and their remaining allies faced Athens, Argos, and Mantinea at the Battle on Mantinea in 418: the Eleans had withdrawn from the campaign and gone home without fighting. The commanders addressed their troops before the battle, and Thucydides' report of the speech to the Mantineians is striking (5.69.1):

[The commander said] to the Mantineians that the battle would be for their native land, and over empire and slavery, not to be deprived of the one after they had known it, and not again to know the other.

Mantineian ambition is here: control of their subordinate allies in Arkadia is 'empire' [*arkhē*]. Here too is hatred of Sparta: alliance with Sparta, which they have known but escaped from, is 'slavery'. In the event the Spartans won the battle, and after it were able to force the Argives and then the Mantineians to make terms (Thuc. 5.64–81). The Eleans, however, not having fought in the battle, did not make terms with the Spartans. Instead the Spartans waited until the Peloponnesian War was finally over, and then, probably in 402, provoked a war with Elis that allowed Sparta to weaken the Eleans seriously by depriving them of all their subordinate allies in the western Peloponnese, and to force Elis back into the Peloponnesian League (Roy 2009c).

13.7 From the Peloponnesian War to Leuktra

Victory in the Peloponnesian War left Sparta triumphant but faced with very grave problems. The complexities of the War meant that Sparta – since it was unwilling to give up the advantages that victory had brought – faced complications in central and northern Greece and also with the Persians in Asia Minor. There were problems even at home in Laconia: in addition to the progressive decline in the number of Spartiates, in 399 there was, reputedly, the conspiracy led by Kinadon (Xen. *Hell.* 3.3.4–11). There was also considerable instability in Greek states: as Thucydides had said (apropos of the internal conflict that broke out in Kerkyra in 427) (3.82.1):

then afterwards the whole Greek world, so to speak, was convulsed, with struggles everywhere by popular leaders to bring in the Athenians and by oligarchs to bring in the Lakedaimonians.

Athens' capacity to intervene was reduced for a time after the Peloponnesian War, but the instability continued, as did the readiness to call in help from outside. Sparta did in general favour oligarchy, but without imposing it on all its allies: after the defeat of Elis Sparta did not remove the democrats who were more influential there (Ruggeri (2004) 16, Schepens (2004) 66–85). Sparta's worst problem, however, was that major allies, especially Boiotia and Corinth, had bitterly opposed the terms of peace agreed with Athens at the end of the War (Xen. *Hell.* 2.2.19), and in particular Sparta's decision not to destroy Athens (see Powell 2006), and continued to be very unhappy with Sparta's policy. In 403 neither Boiotia nor Corinth sent troops on Pausanias' expedition to Attike (Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.30), nor did they join in the war against Elis (Xen. *Hell.* 3.2.25). (The pattern of events in the earlier fourth century is frequently complicated, with developments in one region affecting the situation elsewhere. Sparta was heavily involved, and as a result the Peloponnesian states directly or indirectly were affected too. Detailed narrative can be found in Lewis 1994, 40–4 and Seager 1994, 97–119 and 156–86. See also Ruzé, [Chapter 12](#) this volume.)

Sometimes Spartan direction could tighten the structure of its network of alliances: already in 413/2 Sparta had imposed a ship-building programme with specified obligations for the various states (twenty-five ships each for Sparta and Boiotia, fifteen each for Phokis and Lokris together and for Corinth, and ten each for Arkadia, Pellene, and Sikyon together and for Megara, Troizen, Epidauros, and Hermione together: Thuc. 8.3.2). Then in 377 the troops to be supplied by allies were similarly determined by a new scheme, assigning blocks of 10 per cent to the various allies: one block each from Sparta; Elis; Achaia; Corinth and Megara together; Sikyon, Phleious, and the Akte together; Akarnania; Phokis and Lokris together; and Olynthos

and allies in Thrace together; while the Arkadians were to contribute 20 per cent (D.S. 15.31.2). In addition, according to Xenophon (*Hell.* 5.2.20–2), it had been agreed in 382 BC that any member-state of the Peloponnesian League that wished could, instead of providing men for a military campaign, pay three Aiginetan obols per day in lieu of a hoplite and four times as much in lieu of a cavalryman, with the additional proviso that any state that failed to provide men or money in lieu would be fined two drachmas per day per man: this measure would tend to provide Sparta with cash that could be used to employ mercenaries.

Nonetheless Spartan direction frequently provoked resentment. The Boiotians' and Corinthians' dislike of Spartan policy led to an anti-Spartan alliance, joined also by Argos, Athens, and others, and to the outbreak of the 'Corinthian War' in 394. Despite an early Spartan victory at the River Nemea (Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.9–23) the war continued until 386. During the war Corinth and Argos agreed to an association of their two states much closer than an alliance, though the scanty evidence does not make clear what form the association took: exchange of citizenship, federal union, and complete amalgamation have all been suggested (see Salmon (1984) 354–62: he argues against any complete unification). In the course of the 'Corinthian War' various Greek states had negotiated with Persia, and by 387 Persia decided to back Sparta. The Persian satrap Tiribazos announced to Greek envoys the terms proposed by King Artaxerxes: the Greeks in Asia were to be subject to Persia, while all states in Greece were to be autonomous (apart from Lemnos, Imbros, and Skyros, which would belong to Athens). Moreover Persia, with the help of Greeks who accepted the terms, would attack any state that did not. In fact everyone accepted the terms, except initially the Thebans, who wanted to swear to the terms on behalf of all Boiotia, but yielded when the Spartans threatened to attack. The Corinthians accepted the terms but wanted to retain an Argive garrison: Sparta would not allow this, and again threatened to attack, at which point Corinth gave way. The Greeks then in 386 formally accepted the terms set out by Persia (the 'Peace of Antalkidas', or 'King's Peace'), and the Corinthian War came to an end (Xen. *Hell.* 5.1.30–5). Sparta had succeeded in separating Corinth and Argos, and in bringing Corinth back into the Peloponnesian League.

Yet problems continued, in the Peloponnese and elsewhere. Outside the Peloponnese Thebes gradually re-established its supremacy among the Boiotian states and Athens launched the Second Athenian Confederacy, while in the Peloponnese Sparta used its position of dominance with occasional ruthlessness. In 385/4 Mantinea was ordered to demolish its city walls because the Spartans did not trust its loyalty. When the Mantineians refused, Sparta attacked and captured the city. The Mantineian *polis* was then split up into the four (or five) separate small communities from which Mantinea had originally been formed, and sixty leading democrats were expelled (Xen. *Hell.*

5.2.1–7). In 379 exiles from Phleious who were friendly to Sparta appealed to the Spartans to help them return to their city, and the people of Phleious, faced with a Spartan request that, if refused, would clearly be backed by force, accepted all the Spartans' demands (Xen. *Hell.* 5.2.8–10).

Some fairly minor incidents in the Peloponnese in the 370s are revealing. In 378 Agesilaos set out on an expedition into Boiotia and needed to secure in advance the route across Mt. Kithairon; he therefore commandeered mercenaries who were fighting for Kleitor against Orchomenos in a local Arkadian war, and sent them on ahead (Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.35–7). Agesilaos warned the Orchomenians that, if during his expedition any state made war on any other state, he would march first on the offending state according to the resolution of the allies. This implies that some decisions were taken by the allies in common, and in particular that they had seen fit to ensure that any state sending men to an expedition of the Peloponnesian League would not be at risk from another member of the League. Clearly Sparta had to ensure that an ally supplying men for a military campaign did not put itself at risk from a local enemy while the men were away, and equally that no ally used an alleged threat of such local conflict as an excuse for not participating adequately in a campaign of the Peloponnesian League. That in turn means that local wars between members of the League were recognized as a possibility, and even that, except when a League campaign was launched, Sparta would not necessarily take steps to stop such a war. Indeed Agesilaos, who clearly knew of the war between Kleitor and Orchomenos and of the mercenaries fighting there, apparently would have overlooked the war if he had not been leading a campaign for which he needed Kleitor's mercenaries.

Then under the year 375/4 Diodorus Siculus (15.40) lists a series of upheavals and revolutions in the Peloponnese. At Phigalia exiles attacked the city and then withdrew to Sparta; at Corinth exiles entered the city, but killed each other when they were about to be captured; at Megara an attempt to overthrow the democracy was overcome; at Sikyon an attempted revolution failed; and at Phleious exiles attacked those in the city and were initially successful, but then were compelled to take refuge in Argos. Diodorus' date has been attacked on the grounds that such disturbances could not have happened before Sparta was weakened by defeat at Leuktra: but Stylianou has presented a strong defence of Diodorus' dating ((1998) 330–7), and Sparta's initial lack of interest in the war between Kleitor and Orchomenos suggests that Sparta did not act unless it thought that major interests were at stake.

During the 370s Theban power grew in Boiotia and central Greece, and Athens launched the Second Athenian Confederacy. There was an attempt to preserve peace in Greece, and in 375 a common peace was agreed that in effect prolonged the King's Peace. Indeed in 371 another peace was agreed at a conference in Sparta, though the Thebans were excluded (Ryder (1965) 58–78 and 124–30; Rhodes (2006) 195–8). Nonetheless the risk of major conflict

was obvious, and it came later in 371 when at Leuktra in Boiotia the Thebans defeated the Spartan army in battle.

13.8 The Aftermath of Leuktra

Leuktra did not immediately destroy the Peloponnesian League. When, after the battle, Sparta sent a second expedition to Boiotia, numerous Peloponnesian allies sent troops (Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.17–26), and when, later in 371, a conference at Athens agreed on a new common peace, again the Peloponnesian allies took part along with Sparta (Xen. *Hell.* 6.5.1–3; Ryder (1965) 71–4 and 131–3), though Elis refused to accept that smaller neighbours over which it wanted to re-establish control should be autonomous. However during the winter 371–0 the situation changed. Mantineians, encouraged by the autonomy guaranteed by the peace recently agreed at Athens, re-united the constituent parts of their *polis* and rebuilt and fortified their town, despite Spartan objections (Xen. *Hell.* 6.5.3–5). The Eleans sent three talents towards the cost of construction: they had recently shown that they wanted to regain the subordinate allies lost after defeat by Sparta at the end of the fifth century, and were evidently unsympathetic to Sparta. In Tegea a bloody conflict killed or exiled the pro-Spartan oligarchs and left anti-Spartan democrats in control (Xen. *Hell.* 6.5.6–10). Argos was firmly under democratic control, and a failed oligarchic attempt to take control led to a massacre of wealthy citizens (D.S. 15.57.3–58.4: the *skytalismos*, from the root *skytal* – meaning club or cudgel). It was an aim of the Tegean democrats (Xen. *Hell.* 6.5.6):

that all Arkadia meet together, and that whatever might prevail in common council be valid for the cities.

The democrats controlling Tegea and Mantinea, and no doubt like-minded democrats elsewhere, were quickly able to form an Arkadian confederacy that was broadly democratic and anti-Spartan in sentiment. Orchomenos and Heraia are the only Arkadian states that are known to have resisted the federal movement, and their resistance was soon overcome (Xen. *Hell.* 6.5.11–14). (On the confederacy see Roy 2000, Nielsen (2002) 474–93.) The Arkadians together with the Eleans and the Argives sought an alliance with Athens, which refused, and then succeeded in making an alliance with the Boiotians (D.S. 15.62.3, Dem. 16.12 and 19–20). It is likely that Arkadia, Elis, and Argos were already allied to each other. There was thus already in 370 a powerful anti-Spartan bloc in the Peloponnese, and it invited the Boiotians into the Peloponnese.

The events of the following years in the Peloponnese are complicated in detail, but the main lines are clear. (On the events from 370 to 362 see e.g. Roy 1994 and 2000, Hornblower (2002) 246–60, Rhodes (2006) 252–6.)

Sparta sent an army against Mantinea to little effect: they were opposed by the Arkadians, Argives, and Eleans. When the Boiotians arrived to help their allies, the Spartans had already withdrawn, but the combined forces of Boiotia, Arkadia, Elis, and Argos launched a winter invasion of Laconia and went on to liberate much of Messenia. (On the liberation of Messenia see Luraghi (2008) 209–48). The damage to Sparta was enormous, both in loss of prestige and in the loss of land in Messenia. Independent Messenia was strengthened by the creation of a new, heavily fortified, city at Ithome. About the same time – the exact date is uncertain, but in the years 370–67 – the Arkadian Confederacy united the small communities of southwestern Arkadia into Megalopolis, again with a fortified urban centre, and thus made it more difficult for Sparta to use the route up the Eurotas valley into Arkadia. (On the foundation of Megalopolis see Nielsen (2002) 414–55, Roy 2007).

Again in 369 Boiotia, Arkadia, Elis and Argos campaigned together, with more limited success, this time in the northeastern Peloponnese where most of Sparta's remaining supporters were concentrated. The interests of the four allies were beginning to diverge. Boiotia had major interests outside the Peloponnese. Argos had a long-standing hostility to Sparta, but its immediate interests were in the northeastern Peloponnese, where it campaigned against Epidauros and Phleious (Xen. *Hell.* 7.1.25, 2.2–4), as well as against Corinth. Elis' main ambition was to recover the subordinate allies that it had controlled in the western Peloponnese until the war with Sparta at the end of the fifth century, but the communities of Triphylia, which had made up the greater part of these allies, had now joined the Arkadian Confederacy: their mythical ancestor appeared alongside other sons of Arkas on the great monument erected by the Arkadians at Delphi to celebrate the invasion of Laconia in winter 370–69 (*CEG* 2.824). It was the Arkadians who had the strongest incentive to continue the war, the more so because Spartan armies had to enter or cross Arkadia to campaign in the Peloponnese. It is therefore not surprising that divisions began to appear among the four allies, and their joint operations were limited.

In 367, after numerous Greek states had sent representatives to the Persian king, Thebes convened a congress of Greek states at Delphi to agree on terms of peace. It was the Arkadians who rejected the terms proposed, and thus wrecked the congress. In 366 a combined attempt to win over Achaia led to tensions about what form of government the Achaian cities should have: the Thebans were much less anxious than the Arkadians to promote democracy. The result was that oligarchs took control in the Achaian cities and became firm allies of Sparta. The tyrant Euphron of Sikyon also proved an embarrassment: the Arkadians had initially supported him, but in 366 felt obliged to depose him. One surprising Arkadian success was to secure in 366 a mutual defence pact with Athens, which probably hoped to reduce Arkadia's reliance on Boiotia: Athens nonetheless remained also an ally of Sparta. In

365 Corinth and its neighbours made peace with Boiotia and Argos: this was in effect the end of the Peloponnesian League, though Sparta now had allies in Achaia, and soon also in Elis, where in the mid-360s oligarchs took control and drove out democrats (Ruggeri (2004) 54–7). In the Peloponnese of the 360s Sparta's traditional role of supporter of oligarchy and opponent of democracy becomes very evident.

In 365 Elis broke completely with its former allies the Arkadians. Elis and Arkadia had quarrelled over Lasion, a fortified town on the border between them, and behind that immediate cause of disagreement was the dispute over Triphylia. There followed outright war, in which Arkadia overran much Elean territory, and created a Pisatan puppet-state to administer Olympia. The Pisatans ran the Olympic Games of 364, during which the Eleans – unsuccessfully – attacked the sanctuary of Olympia itself. Elis allied itself with Sparta, while Athens supported Arkadia.

By 363 major disagreements began to appear within the Arkadian Confederacy. The Arkadians had been using funds taken from the sanctuary at Olympia to finance a standing federal military force, and objections to such alleged impiety were raised by Mantinea, soon followed by other Arkadians. The quarrel split the confederacy into a bloc led by Tegea and Megalopolis, faithful to the original aims of the confederacy and hostile to Sparta, and an opposing bloc led by Mantinea, that sought help from Sparta. It is symptomatic of how far leadership in the Peloponnese had passed out of Spartan control that the forces of the Peloponnese and central Greece were polarized by their choice of side to support in the Arkadian schism. The result was major fighting in the Peloponnese in 362, leading to the battle of Mantinea. The Tegean–Megalopolitan bloc had the support of Messenia, Sikyon, Argos, and – above all – Boiotia and its allies from central Greece, while the Mantineian bloc was backed by Sparta, Elis, Achaia, and Athens. In the battle the anti-Spartan forces were faring better until the death of the Theban commander Epameinondas led to an inconclusive outcome. Xenophon's conclusion (*Hell.* 7.5.27, the closing words of the *Hellenica*) was that:

There was still greater uncertainty and disturbance in Greece after the battle than before.

This verdict can be questioned, for the 360s had been a very troubled and uncertain period in the Peloponnese, but it is clearly true that the degree of leadership that Sparta had exercised in the Peloponnese since the later sixth century was gone forever. The Peloponnesian League that had for long brought much of the Peloponnese into alliance with Sparta was now, as we have seen, effectively at an end. Sparta had of course also lost most of Messenia, liberated by Epameinondas and his allies in 370/69. From 365 until the Arkadian Confederacy split in two in 363/2 BC and the states of the

Peloponnese and central Greece then regrouped into the two groups that faced each other at the battle of Mantinea in 362, Sparta's only active allies in the Peloponnese were Elis and Achaia. As noted above, the Eleans fought Sparta in the years following Leuktra, and allied with Sparta in 365/4 only after breaking with their previous, anti-Spartan, allies. Achaia, oligarchic and generally friendly to Sparta in the first decades of the fourth century, had nonetheless preferred not to become involved in Peloponnesian warfare from 370 onwards: it had even allied in 366 with Epameinondas and the Thebans, who allowed the Achaian oligarchs to retain power. It was only when Thebes' other Peloponnesian allies objected to these oligarchic regimes and persuaded the Thebans to act against them that Achaia joined Sparta (Rizakis (1995) 26–9). Even weakened as it was, Sparta nonetheless remained attractive to oligarchic – or at least anti-democratic – Peloponnesians: when a bloc of Arkadian communities led by Mantinea broke away from the democratic, anti-Spartan, group leading the Arkadian Confederacy, Sparta was their natural ally (Xen. *Hell.* 7.5.1–3). And after the battle of Mantinea in 362, inconclusive though it was, Sparta continued to be a major influence in the Peloponnese (See further Stewart, [Chapter 14](#) this volume). Its own internal resources were still considerable, even if less than before Leuktra, and the tradition of Spartan strength and leadership was still powerful. When King Archidamos in 353 BC appealed for the restoration of territory to various Greek states, a manoeuvre evidently intended to allow Sparta to recover territory lost in the 360s especially in Messenia but also on the border with Arkadia, the result was a major mobilization of states in central and southern Greece: Demosthenes' speech *For the Megalopolitans* (Dem. 16) sets out the complex interplay of political interests at this time, and the potential dangers if Sparta regained territory. When Archidamos went on to attack Megalopolis in 352/1, the result was a period of major military campaigning by forces from central Greece and the Peloponnese mobilized on both sides, though the final outcome brought little change. (See Spawforth and Cartledge (1989) 9–12 on these events.) Sparta could still inspire concern and even fear, but no longer dominated Peloponnesian affairs.

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FURTHER READING

Surprisingly little has been written about the Peloponnese as a whole, and interaction among Peloponnesians, whereas there are numerous studies of individual regions of the Peloponnese (including Sparta and Laconia). The best introduction to Peloponnesian development in the classical period is Pretzler (2007); Pretzler is also preparing a book on the Peloponnesian League, which promises to be interesting. For developments in the archaic Peloponnese see Nielsen and Roy (2009). The Peloponnese was of course greatly affected by Sparta from the sixth century onwards: see the relevant material in Cartledge (1987) and (2002). Much attention has been given to the Peloponnesian League because of its political and military importance, and the structure of the League continues to be re-examined, with less emphasis on constitutional structures and more on Realpolitik: this is illustrated by Yates (2005).

NOTES

1 I am grateful to Bill Cavanagh for advice on archaeological evidence: he has no responsibility for the use that I have made of it.

2 'Pisa' was the name for the area around the sanctuary of Olympia: Siewert

1991. In the 360s there was a short-lived independent state in the area, generally referred by modern historians as 'Pisatis' (Roy (2004) 500–1). As noted above, ancient reports of an archaic state in the same area have recently been questioned; I accepted them in 2004, but no longer do so.

CHAPTER 14

From Leuktra to Nabis, 371–192

Daniel Stewart

14.1 Introduction: 371–192

Xenokrates, Theopompos, Mnasilaos.

*When the Spartan spear was dominant, then
Xenokrates took by lot the task of offering a
trophy to Zeus, not fearing the host from the
Eurotas or the Spartan shield. ‘Thebans are
superior in war’, proclaims the trophy won
through victory/bringing victory by the spear
at Leuktra; nor did we run second to Epameinondas.*

(IG VII 2462; Rhodes and Osborne (2003) no. 30)

In the Museum at Thebes is a limestone gravestone. In language that approximates the Doric of Pindar, the Theban poet of a century earlier, the text juxtaposes the Spartans and the Thebans, declaring ‘Thebans are superior in war.’ The text is thought to refer to Leuktra, where on a July morning in 371 BC, the Thebans faced the Spartans in battle and defeated them (Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.4–16; Diod. Sic. 15.55–6).

The account of the Battle of Leuktra is often presented as one chapter in a larger story of decline. It is discussed in the literature – ancient and modern – as one of the ‘hinge points’ of history, an event which marked the end of one historical period and the beginning of another. For Aristotle it was the ‘single blow’ that toppled Sparta (*Politics* 270a15–b6); Xenophon was at pains to explain the reasons for Sparta’s defeat (and not the reasons for Thebes’ victory), and modern scholars followed their lead (for example, Forrest (1995[1968]) 131ff; Bengtson and Bresciani (1969) 280). The history of Sparta in this period is often seen as one of degeneration, of lurching from crisis to crisis. Sparta has traditionally been presented not as an active agent,

and her history from 371 to 192 has been viewed as an extended metaphor for that fact. Military history becomes the stand-in for society and culture, and much of the traditional narrative focuses on how Sparta moved further and further away from her Lykourgan roots.

This chapter aims to highlight a different point of view. As other contributions to this volume show, there was no static Lykourgan model to which Sparta could adhere, and the presentation of Sparta’s history in this period as a type of degenerate or lesser version of its classical past does a disservice to what we do know of Sparta in this period. Authors, ancient and modern, repeatedly turned to Sparta as a topic and a model – and even in the negative reports of kingly ambitions we can see evidence of the continued political, religious, economic and, indeed, military clout of the *polis*. It is those ‘kingly activities’ that must form the organizing principle of this chapter, largely due to the nature of the surviving evidence (see [Table 14.1](#)). Most of the material relating to Sparta in the late classical and Hellenistic periods relates to the political ambitions of Sparta’s kings. The written history, so far as it exists, is very much ‘top down’ and elite-centred. This chapter will try to unpick some of this history, and highlight the continued relevance of Sparta to the wider Greek world in the Hellenistic period.

Table 14.1 Spartan kings from Leuktra to the time of Nabis. Dates are in some cases uncertain. With thanks to Graham Shipley.

<i>Agiad</i>	<i>Eurypontid</i>		
Kleombrotos I	380–371 BC	Agesilaos II	401/400–360 BC
Agesipolis II	371–370 BC	Archidamos III	360–338 BC
Kleomenes II	370–309 BC	Agis III	338–331 BC
Areus I	309–265 BC	Eudamidas I	331–c.305 BC
Akrotatos	265–262 BC	Archidamos IV	c.305–c.275 BC
Areus II	c.262–c.254 BC	Eudamidas II	c.275–c.245 BC
Leonidas II	254–c.235 BC	Agis IV	c.245–241 BC
Kleomenes III	c.235–222 BC	Eudamidas III	241–228 BC
		Archidamos V	228–227 BC
		Eukleidas (Agiad)	227–222 BC

After the Battle of Sellasia, Sparta was a republic from 221 to 219 BC.

Agesipolis III (Agiad)	219–215 BC
Lykourgos (Eurypontid)	219–c.210 BC
Machanidas (tyrant)	c.210–207 BC

Pelops (Eurypontid)	c.210–206 BC
Nabis (usurper)	206–192 BC

14.2 Prelude to Leuktra

The ‘beginning of the end’ of Sparta’s ability to project power outside its borders is typically held to be the battle of Leuktra in 371. It is worth remembering, however, that Sparta had been fighting Thebes since 379, and would continue to do so until 366 with few breaks (375–4, 371–70), and antipathy would sometimes break out into open warfare until the death of the Theban general Epameinondas in 362, during the battle of Second Mantinea. For the people who lived through that time, Leuktra was a disaster, but it was not necessarily seen as any more disastrous than Sphakteria in 425 or the more recent episode of the Athenian Iphikrates’ mangling of a Spartan *mora* outside Sikyon in 390 (Xen. *Hell.* 4.5.11–17). Tellingly, the Spartan response to the Iphikrates episode was strikingly similar to that which occurred after Leuktra: male relatives of the dead apparently rejoiced at the news (Xen. *Hell.* 4.5.17; compare with Leuktra, Plut. *Ages.* 30.2–6).

In this, perhaps, we can see something of the Spartan elite’s inability to face up to reality. There was something of a culture of ignorance amongst the Spartan citizenry, an expectation that their city’s reputation was reflective of current ability, and not only of past deeds. There is a significant difference, it must be remembered, between attitudes expressed in the rhetoric of some members of the political elite, and in the practical reality of governing. In some modern sources, Sparta is seen as being resistant to change – as stubbornly holding on to institutions and practices from the archaic and classical periods that actively damaged Sparta’s contemporary political standing (for example, Chrimes 1949; compare with Kennell 1995, and the contributions in Powell and Hodkinson 2002). Sparta can be seen to wrestle with the concept of change in a manner similar to other *poleis*. Unlike Athenian democracy or Theban military innovations, however, Sparta’s changes did not alter her political fortunes for the better, and as a result Sparta is erroneously painted as a stubbornly backward *polis* in a rapidly evolving world. In many ways the reigning Eurypontid king Agesilaos II epitomized the paradoxical nature of Sparta’s elite political culture in this period. He was at times brilliant, pragmatic, and innovative, and also stubborn, willful, and beholden to the language of tradition. Before his death in 360 BC, Sparta had spent the previous thirty years squandering its reputation in fruitless foreign adventurism, alienating those closest to home (see Cartledge (1987) 77–98), but it also reached its greatest extent and influence. In other words, this ‘culture of ignorance’ may also be seen as a ‘conflict of values’ between both

internal and external forces (to steal a phrase from Hodkinson 1983).

Sparta had thrown its significant military and political weight behind the idea of ‘autonomy’ at the close of the fifth century. It had won the Peloponnesian War in 404 by using this idea to secure funding from Persian sources and support from Athens’ subject allies. The Corinthian War, and the King’s Peace of 386, only served to reinforce Sparta’s ideological adherence to the principle of ‘autonomy’, now guaranteed in treaty. But the notion of ‘autonomy’ was a powerful one amongst the *poleis* of mainland Greece, despite the fact that it rarely had a clear definition. The activities of Lysander and Agesilaos in the early fourth century suggested to some that for Sparta, autonomy meant hegemony. In 385 Sparta subdued Mantinea, a democratic *polis* in eastern Arkadia, north of Laconia, and dissolved the *polis* into its constituent villages (‘dioikism’, opposed to the more normal ‘coming together’ of ‘synoikism’). Athens also committed isolated violations of the autonomy clause, but seemed quite happy to ignore Sparta’s actions so as to maintain the idea of a ‘dual-hegemony’ (Xen. 5.2, 6.3.10–17) and rebuild its naval confederacy. Thebes, however, was growing increasingly alarmed at Sparta’s heavy-handed and one-sided interpretation of the autonomy provision (as in Xen. 5.1.32f.). In 382, the Spartan commander Phoibidas (on his way to fight Olynthos in Thracian Chalkidike) aided the pro-Spartan element in Thebes in seizing that *polis*’ acropolis, the Kadmeia. A Spartan garrison held the citadel for three years. According to Xenophon, Sparta attempted to justify this action within the terms of the King’s Peace, but he saw it as an act of impiety for which Leuktra was the punishment (5.4.1). Sparta’s actions were beginning to draw unwelcome attention from many quarters, not least from the perioikic *poleis* of Laconia.

The perioikic *poleis* are a topic of some discussion in contemporary literature (Shipley 1997; Kennell 1999; Ducat 2010 and in this work, Vol. 2 [Chapter 23](#), offer the best introductions). These communities, mostly in Laconia but with a few also in Messenia, existed as city-states in their own right, except for a level of dependence on Sparta (for this reason they are often called ‘dependent *poleis*’; see Ducat, this work, [Chapter 23](#)). These communities are traditionally seen as dependent in the sense that they were subjugated politically and economically, or that they had relinquished some of their political rights for guarantees of protection. Standard textbooks on Sparta tend to portray these ‘dwellers around’ as craftsmen and traders and little else, a convenient Spartan hedge around the Lykourgan prohibition on wealth-generating activities. Recent research suggests the relationship is much more complicated than that – far from being nodes in a proto-centralized economy, or subject peoples one step above helotage, the *perioikoi* are now seen as partners in the Spartan state – serving in Sparta’s army, and fighting in some phalanxes as Spartiates (Hodkinson 1983; Cartledge (1987) 37–43). Most evidence suggests that in the classical period they lacked political *autonomia*,

or control over what we might call ‘foreign policy’, but their activities in the fourth and third centuries suggest that their abrogation of particular political activities was not a foregone conclusion (Shipley 1997).

While the evidence is scarce, perhaps the easiest way to view the *perioikoi* is as citizens of *Lakonikē* – the classical name for Spartan controlled territory – without the responsibilities or duties of Spartiates, but in all other aspects partners in the Spartan state: owning land, serving in the military, supervising helots, farming, trading, governing their local communities. This is not to suggest that they enjoyed equal standing with the Spartiate ruling class, but rather that they were members of the Spartan polity helping to create and maintain that polity, and ultimately sharing in its successes and failures as willing participants.

The increase in Spartan military activities in the fourth century up to Leuktra implies a concomitant increase in the numbers of the *perioikoi* having to serve in the military. As Spartiate numbers declined, a greater share of the military burden would have to be carried by those communities who had little say in the scope or direction of military activity (this was perhaps also mirrored by a rise in mercenary use: see Millender 2006). Furthermore, increasing military commitments saw an increase in casualties, if not outright defeats, as in the campaign against Olynthos (Xen. *Hell.* 5.2; Diod. Sic. 15.19), and during repeated Spartan invasions of Boiotia in the early 370s which resulted in the Spartan defeat at Tegyra in 375 (Diod. Sic. 15.37; Plut. *Pelop.* 16). Shipley evocatively summarizes the situation: ‘Once Sparta becomes a leaky vessel, we begin to see the *perioikoi* taking to the life-rafts’ ((1997) 213). The acquiescence of the *perioikoi* in the fifth century helped shape Spartan success. Once those gains were squandered, once fewer and fewer Spartans took to the field, once the costs began to outweigh the potential gains, acquiescence became resistance (as noted by Xenophon in the immediate aftermath to Leuktra: *Hell.* 6.4.15).

In short, in the years before Leuktra Sparta had become increasingly enmeshed in the complications of its own ‘conflict of values’, a significant component of which surrounded the concept of *autonomia* and its application to other *poleis*. Sparta, in part, perceived its right to be guarantor of the King’s Peace through the lens of its military successes. It saw itself as the acknowledged *hēgemōn*, despite other *poleis*’ disagreement over that status. Yet at the same time, Sparta was also quite vulnerable: stretched militarily, increasingly dependent on non-Spartiate military contributions, and stubbornly resistant to tactical innovation. Sparta’s problem in the fourth century was not simply an issue of *oliganthrōpia* (to use Aristotle’s term for declining population; *Pol.* 1270a33–34) or increasing military competition; the problem was the alienation and fracturing of the broader polity. Viewed this way, Leuktra is not a hinge-point of history but simply one link in a long chain of political disaffection, a chain that continues well into the Hellenistic

period, and extends back into the classical past.

Perioikic involvement in the battle of Leuktra is hard to gauge. An allied army of 11,000 marched into Boiotia (Xen. *Hell.* 6.3–4), and by day's end we are told 1000 Lakedaimonians lay dead on the field, 400 of them Spartiates (Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.13–15; Diod. Sic. 15.55–6). Of the other 10,000, little is said – though thanks to the diagonal advance of the Theban Pelopidas, which scarcely engaged them, casualties were probably light. Perhaps we can assume the other 600 dead were from perioikic contingents, but there are certainly no definitive assurances in the extant sources. Either way, the *perioikoi* certainly formed part of the 11,000 and would have been witness to the ill-conceived anti-Theban campaign, the ramshackle preparations for battle, the reluctant leadership of the Spartan Kleombrotos, the brilliant restraint of the Thebans, and the pile of dead Spartiates – a literal pile, as the Thebans separated them from the rest of the dead in order to emphasize the nature of the Spartan (as opposed to Lakedaimonian) defeat (Paus. 9.13.11–12). The Spartan king Agesilaos' long anti-Theban campaigning seemed purpose-made to alienate the remaining Spartan allies; Leuktra only solidified that growing estrangement.

14.3 The Aftermath of Leuktra

The immediate aftermath of the battle provoked a constitutional crisis in Sparta. Of the 700 Spartiates sent to the battle, 300 survived. Three hundred is an important figure (Figueira 2006), not unrelated to the 300 of the Theban sacred band (Plut. *Pelop.* 18–19), or the 300 seen in the Archaic Messenian hero Aristomenes' elite corps (Paus. 4.18.1; his shield, in some accounts, was used by Epameinondas at Leuktra, see Ogden (2004) 129–51), or the 300 Spartiates involved in the Battle of the Champions in 546 (Herodotus 1.82;), or the Spartiates who died at Thermopylae (Herodotus 7.224). The juxtaposition is surely deliberate, especially within Plutarch and Pausanias (on numbers in historiography generally, see Rubincam 2003). The 300 Spartan survivors lived because many of them had fled the fighting. Had they been branded *tresantes* ('tremblers': Ducat 2006), they would have been subject to economic and social sanctions – if we are to believe Plutarch. Ducat has quite convincingly argued that the status of 'tremblers' as a definitive group should be called into question (Ducat 2006). In any event, Agesilaos, displaying his capacity for political pragmatism, decided that in this instance 'the laws must sleep for a day' (Plut. *Ages.* 30.5–6).

The aftershocks of the Spartan defeat spread through the ranks of the Peloponnesian League. Mantinea, previously divided by force into five villages in 385 (Xen. *Hell.* 5.2.3–7), reformed under a revamped democratic constitution in 371/70. The Tegean oligarchy, which Sparta had previously

supported (read ‘imposed’, Thuc. 5.81.2, 5.82–1.5), was forced out, in favour of a democratic constitution, with the aid of a Mantineian army. These two strategically important *poleis* formed the heart of a new Arkadian federal league, a league specifically designed to check the hegemonic ambitions of Sparta (Xen. *Hell.* 6.5.3–9 and Roy, this volume, [Chapter 13](#)).

Arkadia, it must be noted, was strategically significant to Spartan interests. Situated in the mountainous heart of the Peloponnese, Arkadia had long been viewed by Sparta as ‘her backyard’, and a series of conflicts – military and diplomatic – in the sixth century had brought it in line with Spartan interests (Nielsen 2002, 127–9; Welwei 2004 and Roy, this volume). The promotion of pro-Spartan factions within Arkadian *poleis* not only removed a potential threat on Sparta’s northern borders, but also provided Sparta with secure routes around the Peloponnese. In the classical period, it was a significant source of troops for Peloponnesian League expeditions. This relationship, however, was not always cordial – Arkadian *poleis* revolted from Spartan hegemony several times over the course of the fifth century, most notably following the earthquake of the mid 460s (Nielsen 2000).

The Thebans were well aware of the political factionalism present within Greek *poleis* – after all, the pro-Spartan oligarchic contingent in Thebes had only recently been overthrown – and such factionalism was often exploited by dominant *poleis* to their own benefit. The Theban support of the new Arkadian League is a good example, not just because it represented a significant bulwark against Sparta and a convenient ally, but because it denied the pro-Spartan Arkadian faction political traction. Agesilaos, perhaps realizing the necessity of a propaganda victory if not a military one (Plut. *Ages.* 31 is slightly more charitable), hastily pulled together an army to meet the new threat and marched around Arkadia bombastically but without any significant fighting in mid-winter of 370. He returned home having highlighted the fact that Spartans still felt Arkadia was theirs by right, and that – should they choose – Sparta could still field a significant force (Xen. *Hell.* 6.5.10–21). In itself, this was not an insignificant act, especially in light of the risks of the invasion. Xenophon’s account itself seems to imply that Agesilaos is conscious of the superficiality of the strength of the force he has assembled (*Hell.* 6.5.20–1), but it is surely significant that the king himself is leading the invasion; the intended audience was not only Arkadian.

Unsurprisingly, the Arkadians wished to adjust Spartan thinking. They were well aware of Spartan weakness, and of the disaffection of the perioikic communities of Skiritis and Karyai situated along their shared border (Xen. *Hell.* 6.5.25–6). Expanding their alliance to include Argos and Elis, they issued a call to Athens and Thebes to invade the vulnerable Spartan homeland. Athens demurred, perhaps alarmed at the sudden rise of Thebes (see Cargill 1981), but the Theban Epameinondas seized this stroke of political good fortune and invaded Laconia, in 370/369, to Spartan minds the

first such foreign invasion since the Herakleidai at the close of the Bronze Age.

Crucially, as the allied army of Thebes and Arkadia advanced south, several perioikic communities began to secede from Spartan control (definitely Skiritis and Karyai, and perhaps others. The evidence is far from clear; Christien (2006) 171–4). It is likely that without their compliance – in effect, active involvement – the invasion would not have been so immediately successful. In many respects, this was a bigger blow to Sparta than Leuktra. The border was a symbolically potent space, and there were a series of rituals required of any Spartan army which sought to cross it. The fact that this liminal area was no longer in Spartan control – that it had in fact chosen to secede – would have had powerful religious resonances (on the borders generally, see Christien, 2006). Tellingly, the perioikic communities of the south and east remained loyal, as did the Laconian helots, but the fissures were there for all to see. So great was the crisis that the Spartans offered freedom to any helot who volunteered to serve to fight on behalf of Sparta: more than 6000 answered the call.

Epameinondas continued to push south into the Eurotas valley, laying waste to the land as he went. He made it as far as the port city of Gytheion on the southern coast, which withstood a short siege behind its walls. While open to debate, some of his motives seem clear. It is unlikely that he intended to capture Sparta – given time pressures on his own command, which was due to end imminently, and his desire to leave a check on his newfound Peloponnesian allies – but he certainly wished to deprive the *polis* of the illusion of security, both militarily and economically. Striking into the heart of Laconia and moving quickly south to the coast sent a strong message not only to Sparta, but to Sparta's subject and dependent peoples. A central component of the presumed perioikic bargain was the security that Sparta offered her dependent settlements. Rampaging Theban forces likely represented a severe shock to both Spartan and perioikic illusions on that front.

In a masterly stroke of military bravado, the Theban then took his forces north and west and in one bold move dramatically altered the political geography of the Peloponnese. He invaded the Pamisos valley of Messenia, recalled expatriate Messenians (some from as far afield as North Africa and Sicily), and founded at the foot of Mt. Ithome the *polis* of Messene (Diod. Sic. 15.66). Ithome represented a significant religious site for the subject Messenians and had an important sanctuary of Zeus. Many of the myths relating to Messenian identity reported by Diodorus and Pausanias (and therefore written down long after the events of our period) are tied to the site. Spartan control of the religiously important Ithome had been, no doubt, an important means of asserting and maintaining dominance, an importance echoed in the foundation ritual undertaken by Messenians, Thebans, and Argives (Grandjean 2003). Arguably the most important event for Sparta in the fourth century was not

the defeat of Leuktra, but the foundation of this independent *polis* in the territory of its formerly subjugated neighbour. Sparta not only lost nearly half of her most fertile *polis*-controlled territory, but gained a new threat on her western border.

The fortifications of the new *polis* alone were a significant deterrent to future Spartan aggression. Not only was the settlement at Ithome a showcase for developments in late classical fortifications (the impressive stone walls, still extant in some places, have been the feature of several studies: Winter 1971; Ober 1987; and ongoing fieldwork by Themelis [for this, see the database at: <http://www.chronique.efa.gr/>]), but settlements along the routes into Messenia were fortified and reinforced with garrisons (Christien 2006). In the extent, fabric, and expense of these anti-Spartan fortifications can be read, inversely but clearly, the threat Sparta still presented. Thebes, her Boiotian and Peloponnesian allies, invested heavily in restraining Sparta, and conceived a concerted policy of economic, political, religious and military contestation of Sparta's ambitions. The thick stone walls of Messene are not only testament to the tenacious will for self-determination of the newly freed Messenians, but also show that other Greeks still saw Sparta as extraordinarily potent.

Along the Tegean border, Karyai was quickly fortified by the Arkadians, and Sellasia remained outside Spartan control for more than five years. Despite Spartan attempts to check the tide – as for example their victory over an army of Arkadians, Argives and Messenians in the Tearless Battle of 368 (Plut. *Ages.* 33.3–5) – the pattern was clear: Spartan resurgence was being opposed effectively. In the campaign of 369/8, the Thebans had a hand in the foundation of Megalopolis in the southwest Arkadian plain (Xen. *Hell.* 7.1.28–32; Diod. Sic. 15.72.4), a new city that would prove an effective and long-lasting opponent to Spartan ambitions. It even incorporated several perioikic communities into its new citizen body: Oion, Belbina, Leuktron, and Malea in Aigytis (Paus. 8.27.3–4; Hawkins (2011) 429). Roads from Elis, Messenia and Laconia all went through Megalopolitan territory; all along the edges of Spartan (not necessarily Lakedaimonian) territory, in the stones and mortar of walls and forts, we can read the containment policy of Thebes and the Arkadian League. This was a concerted policy of containment, an 'Arkadian wall' hemming Sparta in.

These external political crises were mirrored internally in Sparta. Two separate conspiracies in 369 sought to overthrow Agesilaos: one amongst the *perioikoi*, the other amongst the Spartiates themselves (who perhaps saw rapprochement with Thebes as preferable to armed and enfranchised helots). Both were suppressed (Plut. *Ages.* 32.6.11), but they are symptomatic of the fracturing of support amongst the political classes within Sparta.

By 365 most of the Peloponnesian league had melted away, and a renewal of the King's Peace in 367 had guaranteed the autonomy (and existence) of Messene, supported and sworn to by everyone except Sparta (Xen. *Hell.*

7.1.33–7). This most muscular of *poleis* was becoming increasingly isolated, obstinate, and (in a wide political sense) irrelevant. Powell (2001, 97–8) rightly cautions against relying on the old trope of ‘Spartan stupidity’ as if it were explanatory. Sparta, despite individual accounts of stupidity, short-sightedness, corruption or self-interest (all written by non-Spartans, it must be remembered), cultivated a culture of shrewd acumen and strategic foresight amongst her leaders. The result was a delicate balancing act requiring the careful use of limited resources, purposeful misinformation, and occasional rapid action that allowed Sparta to dominate much of Greece from the mid-fifth century and into the fourth. Sparta liked to be viewed as ‘simple’, as stolidly militaristic despite any evidence to the contrary, and it promoted that vision of itself to the outside world, but it was never accurate. That balancing act had taken centuries to create – the Messenian wars traditionally ascribed to the eighth and seventh centuries, the expansion into Arkadia and the northern Peloponnese in the sixth, the sequence of treaties that bound the Peloponnesian League together, its religious and political reputation burnished by the Persian wars and interactions with Athens – but it was only ever a delicate and continuously negotiated series of nested (and contested) relationships – the fallout from the earthquake of the mid 460s highlights this (see [Chapter 11](#), this volume).

To this qualified picture we should add a caveat regarding the role of individuals in shaping Spartan history. The narrative sources – indeed many modern sources – focus on the actions of individuals, yet when we talk about ‘Sparta’s leaders’ we are talking about the kings (plural), and the ephors, and the senior members of the *gerousia*. These were the deliberative bodies of the Spartan state. Agesilaos is a prime example – central to Xenophon’s account, a subject of one of Plutarch’s biographies, and a focus of Cartledge’s exhaustive scholarship (1987) – but ultimately many of the actions ascribed to him were the results of decisions taken by the Spartan polity; he was an instrument, as well as a shaper, of policy. What we often do not have is the deliberative sequence, the debates, the contrarian viewpoints, the local political considerations that shaped the decision-making process. We have collective decisions ascribed to individuals.

After the Theban invasions, Agesilaos spent the remainder of his reign trying to regain Messenia, establishing the pattern for ambitious kings to follow. ‘Regain Messenia’ became the enduring ambition for those seeking high office in Sparta for the remainder of the period under discussion. The king focused his attention on finding alternative sources for resources lost with Messenia, and essentially bartered his reputation and that of his city in order to do so. He made a circumspect foray to the Hellespont sometime between 366 and 364 in order to ‘advise’ Ariobarzanes, satrap of Phrygia, and Mausolus, dynast of Karia, in their unsuccessful revolt against Artaxerxes II (Xen. *Ages.* 2.26.7).

The money from these activities allowed Agesilaos to lead a citizen army once more, in 362. Competition between democratic and oligarchic factions within the Arkadian League had finally led to open conflict, with each side asking for military support from Thebes and Sparta respectively. Epameinondas once more led the Theban army into the Peloponnese, and Agesilaos marched out to meet him with his entire force. Upon hearing that Agesilaos had left the city of Sparta essentially undefended, Epameinondas hurried to attack the city itself. Agesilaos learned of this in time, and split his forces, managing to avert disaster by forcing Thebes to withdraw. The two sides met in full force near Mantinea, and though Thebes soundly defeated Sparta, Epameinondas and his two chosen successors, Iolaidas and Daiphantos, were fatally wounded (Xen. *Hell.* 7.5.27; Diod. Sic. 15.85–7). The battle was meant to secure Theban hegemony, and instead it produced a southern Greece with no clear leader, wearied by war. The first common peace without Persian involvement was drawn up as a result, and once more Agesilaos refused to swear an oath so long as Messenian independence was recognized (Isoc. 6.28; Plut. *Ages.* 35.3–5).

Time was running out for the aging king, however. The historiographic record places his birth in 444 BC, making him eighty-four at the time of his death. By 360, he was in Egypt selling his services to another rebellion from Persian rule. His behaviour in Egypt typifies his approach to pragmatic politics, agreeing to work for one master, before deserting him for another. He died on the coast of Libya on his way back to Sparta with his fee of 230 talents (Xen. *Ages.* 2.30–1; Plut. *Ages.* 40.2–4; on Agesilaos as mercenary, see Cartledge (1987) ch. 15). Throughout his life, he fought for what he perceived to be Sparta's best interests; he was, at times, short-sighted in how he identified those interests. His willingness to privilege resolutions to internal political conflicts (as with Sphodrias and Phoibidas; though compare Cartledge (1987) 136–7 with Rice (1975) 120) despite the damaging implications for Sparta's relationships with other *poleis*, and an obsession with Thebes, were part of what cost Sparta her hegemony, her reputation, and her ability to project power beyond the bounds of Laconia.

14.4 Archidamos to Eudamidas

Agesilaos' son, Archidamos III, was much like his father. He too had trouble reconciling his perception of Sparta with the contemporary political reality. He had served as virtual co-regent for the last decade of his father's rule, and ascended to the Eurypontid throne with little difficulty. Sources for his reign, indeed up until the ascendancy of Macedon in 338, are remarkably scarce (on

the sources for this period generally, see Cartledge and Spawforth (2002) 8–10), and this limits what we can say about him. What is important is that he ruled at a time when the nature of inter-state politics was shifting in a fundamental manner.

World-Systems theory – developed by Immanuel Wallerstein (1974) to help explain the varying developmental trajectories of modern nations through the study of the exploitation of resources – sees political history as the evolution of power relationships and economics between a ‘core’ of politically independent states and the ‘periphery’ of dependent territory (in relation to the ancient world, see Bintliff 1997 and Kardulias and Hall 2008). In simple terms, developmental differences between the core and periphery are effaced by continued contact, until the relative positions between the two shift. The exploitation of the periphery by the core requires investment in infrastructure, education and local contacts. This eventually gives to the periphery more and more control of its own resources, intellectual and economic, until periphery replaces core. This theory purposefully seeks to limit the explanatory input of individual historical actors.

In some respects this theory forms a useful heuristic tool with which to consider the broad outline of Greek history, and helps us think about why Sparta reacted the way that it did to broader developments of the fourth century. It is not a model that ‘explains’ Spartan behaviour, but it is a way for us to interrogate standard interpretations. For much of the fifth and early fourth centuries we might characterize the ‘core’ as being the *poleis* of central and southern Greece. Thebes, Athens and Sparta (with occasional input from Corinth and Argos) determined the nature and expression of inter-state politics, and viewed the ‘peripheral’ north (Thrace, Macedonia, and Thessaly to an extent) as an extension of southern political conflicts. That relationship changed as the ‘periphery’ became a more central, and more autonomous, player in broader Greek politics. The relatively new political entity of Macedonia – in the form of a geographically defined territorial kingdom with massive resources at its disposal – emerged in the north to challenge the status of the southern ‘core’. Much of the fourth century can be seen as the history of this re-alignment.

Wallerstein’s initial theory is focused on economy and the accumulation and exploitation of resources. This too is a useful device for approaching Greek history if we extend the traditional definition of resource to include not only commodities (mined, grown, or born) but also religious and political influence. The contestation, accumulation, and disbursement of these resources helps us understand the complicated intersection of political, military, and religious conflicts that occur under Archidamos. His reign coincided with the rise of Macedonian involvement in southern Greek affairs. Though his accession was in 360, we first hear of him in 356/5, in relation to the Third Sacred War.

The Third Sacred War (356/5–346 BC) arose from a dispute between the Phokians and the Lokrians over control of the lucrative sanctuary of Delphi. Sparta had a long and complicated relationship with the sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi. The kings had a special role in obtaining and interpreting oracular responses from the sanctuary, and were thought to have Delphic sanction for their authority (Thuc. 5.16.2; Parker (1989) 154f. – but compare Powell (2010) esp. 85–6). The kings were central to the marshalling of religious resources on behalf of the state (see Flower, [Chapter 16](#) this volume), in placating the gods and securing their good will (Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 13). Most religious acts in the ancient world were personal, rather than political, but for Sparta the political act was always religious. Apollo, and Delphi, were a core component of that.

The oracular centre at Delphi was managed by a sacred council, the Amphiktyony, the majority of whose members were drawn from the communities of Thessaly. Thebes had exploited its position after Leuktra to manipulate the council into fining Sparta an exorbitant 500 talents for its seizure of the Theban *akropolis*, the Kadmeia, in 382 (Diod. Sic. 16.29.2–3). Sparta had long-standing connections with the council, however, and had even helped pay for the restoration of the sanctuary after an earthquake in 373 (on this, see Cartledge and Spawforth (2002) 235 n. 21). In 356, again at the instigation of Thebes, the Amphiktyony doubled Sparta's unpaid fine and, at the same time, inflicted a penalty on Phokis for cultivating sacred land. In some respects, we can see Thebes and Sparta using proxies, in the form of Delphi and Phokis, to continue their conflict, and one of the results of this war was the eventual downfall of Thebes. One of the factors in Thebes' success against Sparta in the 360s had been its ability to sow dissension amongst Sparta's traditional Peloponnesian allies. Sparta learned from that, and used similar tactics against Thebes, by judiciously supporting Phokis and helping provoke the war (McInerney 1999, 205–15 deals with the Third Sacred War from the Phokian perspective). This in itself is revealing about Sparta's continued ability to shape broader politics, and convincing proof of the pragmatic political innovation Sparta was capable of – the Sacred War kept Thebes occupied and out of Peloponnesian affairs for over a decade.

That was to come later, however. The beginnings can be seen in 356, when Archidamos used Thebes' isolationist policies to help the Phokians, granting them a large – and according to Diodorus, 'secret' – sum of 15 talents for the Phokian leader Philomelos. Philomelos used the money to assemble a mercenary force and seized the Temple of Apollo at Delphi. The Phokians then had access to the stockpile of dedications – composed primarily of precious metals, which could be melted into coin – to fund an even more significant mercenary army. The plunder of Apollo's treasures seems to have cooled Sparta's support (though it did send troops in 352 according to Diodorus), and it created for the Phokians an unwinnable war: it was one

thing to 'borrow' from the god in a time of need, but most of the dedications were not Phokian to begin with – this was desecration, and it hardened opposition. Moreover, though plunder was required to field their army, no amount of success could secure them a lasting victory. On the other hand, the Phokian position ensured that they would not capitulate to Thebes or the Amphiktyony. On this interpretation, Sparta appears particularly shrewd.

During the course of this war, the Thessalians called on the aid of Philip II of Macedon to aid them in their effort against the Phokians. Through the wealth of Delphi, the Phokian mercenary force inflicted on Philip the only two defeats he ever suffered in pitched battle. Sparta's role, however, was largely tangential. Archidamos used the broader distraction of the Sacred War to turn his attention to Megalopolis and Argos. In 351 the king, along with his son Agis, attacked Megalopolis with mercenaries paid for by Phokis – ostensibly on the grounds of trying to reclaim 'ancestral lands' (Dem. 16.4, 11, 16; Diod. Sic. 16.39.4–7; Paus. 4.28.2). His target was the perioikic communities in Aigyti synoikized with Megalopolis, but he likely framed this justification with his eye on the retrieval of Messenia. Even this more 'gentle' justification found little favour outside of Laconia, and the best Sparta could do was gain an assurance of Athenian neutrality; in any event, Archidamos was not successful.

Sparta's actions in the Peloponnese proved to be broadly insignificant in the larger political arena, despite her success in marginalizing Thebes. Philip had become the military leader of Thessaly before the Battle of the Crocus Field in 352, and he defeated the Phokians decisively in 346. Sparta faced the limits of its influence, sending a delegation to Pella in the summer of 346 before the fate of Phokis had been decided, but to no avail (Isoc. 5.49–50; Aesch. 2.136). Philip gained the Phokians' votes on the Amphiktyonic Council, and now controlled over two-thirds of the votes (through the Thessalian votes). One of his first declarations called on the Spartans to renounce their claims to Messenia (Dem. 6.13), and in response to Sparta's silence he sent financial aid to both the Arkadians and the Argives. Perhaps in desperation, by 342 Archidamos had followed the example of his father and served as a mercenary in Crete and South Italy, where, according to tradition, he died fighting for the Spartan colony of Taras in 338 (Theop. 115F232; Diod. Sic. 16.62–3; Strabo 6.280; Paus. 3.10.5; on Taras, Malkin 1994).

In 338, at Chaeronea, an alliance of Greek states including Athens, Thebes, Corinth and Achaia faced an army of 30,000 Macedonians under Philip. Upon his victory, Philip imposed a garrison on Thebes, and made the city pay a hefty indemnity. He dissolved the Second Athenian Naval Confederacy. The age of autonomy was all but over. It is important to note that on the day when the southern Greek states stood up to oppose the imposition of Macedonian hegemony, Sparta was elsewhere. Perhaps Sparta thought that its lack of involvement would give it an opportunity to reassert its place within the

Peloponnesian, or perhaps the mercenary activities of the king were seen as promoting Sparta's dream of re-conquering Messenia, but Philip would not allow Sparta to pursue its own course. In 338/7 he invaded Laconia, purportedly on behalf of his Peloponnesian allies Argos, Elis, Arkadia and Messenia, but principally in order to prevent any potential opposition from the one-time policeman of the Hellenic world.

This third invasion of Laconia followed the Theban-established policy of territorial marginalization. Philip stripped Sparta of all her northern Laconian borderlands, together with the western area of Dentheliatis, the eastern Laconian coast as far south as Prasiai, and the northeastern shore of the Messenian Gulf. Sparta was left with the Eurotas valley and the Tainaron and Malea peninsulas (*IG* IV² 1.57ff; Paus. 2.38.5; *FGrH* 115F238, 243, 244; but see Christien 2006). The Sparta that the new king Agis III inherited in 338 was much reduced, in almost every respect.

Sparta abstained from Philip's nascent League of Corinth, and though this abstention later came to rankle with his great son and successor Alexander (Plut. *Alex.* 16.18), it suited Philip. The League of Corinth was a loose alliance of Greek states brought together by Philip to facilitate his planned war against Persia – indeed, his generally lenient treatment of states after Chaeronea helped facilitate the formation of the League. Sparta's absence allowed him to point to the old idea of *autonomia* and then to Sparta, as evidence that his League was an alliance of voluntary partners, despite the political reality. For Sparta and Agis, this meant they could hold themselves aloof, and use the distraction of the Macedonians (in both senses) to focus on their standard foreign policy aim: regaining Messenia. Macedonian attention was elsewhere, so the time for action was ripe. Similarly, the threat of Macedonia was ever-present, so the perceived need for Messenia was not lessened. Not the death of Philip in 336, not the rumour of Alexander's death in 335, not the southern Greek revolt or the destruction of Thebes in that same year in retribution, could spur Sparta to visible action. The removal of Sparta's most-recent antagonist likely only exacerbated the sense of threat that Sparta felt: not only did it show the lengths to which Alexander would go to quell opposition, it removed a convenient buffer (as the Sacred War had shown) between Sparta and outside interference in the Peloponnesian.

Quietly, however, Agis had been acting – slowly gathering support and resources. Kleomenes II, the near-silent Agiad king, appears twice in 336: with a victorious chariot team at the Pythian games, and as a benefactor to Delphi (Poralla and Bradford (1985) 182). Given his virtual absence from the historical record, he is likely to have been acting at Agis' behest. Indeed from 370 to 309, he was the Agiad king serving alongside the Eurypontid. Kleomenes II was one of the longest serving of the Agiad kings of Sparta (Diod. Sic. 20.29), yet little information survives relating to him directly. He was the son of Kleombrotos I (ruled 380–71 BC), who died at Leuktra, and he

served as co-king to Agesilaos II, Archidamos III, Agis III and Eudamidas. He has been called a historical cipher, and in many respects he presages what was to happen in Spartan politics. His remarkable political longevity suggests that it was expedient for the trio of strong and charismatic Eurypontids to keep him as co-ruler; indeed, they operated as *de facto* monarchs the entire time Kleomenes was on the throne. Historically, we tend to see the abolition of the dyarchy as an ‘innovation’ of Kleomenes III in 228, but in truth the Eurypontids of the fourth century had already stumbled on the utility of this idea. Kleomenes’ activities in 336 might have been Sparta ‘testing the waters’ of anti-Macedonian feeling by sending a king to take subtle diplomatic soundings at significant religious events, though this is speculation.

The subsequent silence of the sources suggests that Sparta balked at immediate defiance, but the re-conquest of Messenia remained uppermost in Agis’ mind. In order to facilitate this with a smaller Laconia (and therefore a smaller resource base), Agis turned to the most trusted bankroller in Greek history: the Persians. As Alexander’s army swept through Asia Minor, the Persians decided to harass the Macedonians through the rear. In 335/4 Agis had perhaps been involved with negotiations with Memnon, the Rhodian Greek in charge of the Persian king Darius’ navy. In 333 Agis himself met with Persian envoys on Siphnos, and money was despatched to the Peloponnese on his behalf. Agis even had a hand in transferring Crete to the Persian cause in 333/2 (Arr. *Anab.* 2.13–4–6; Curt. 4.8.15; *IG II²* 399). In 332/1, he managed to bring together an anti-Macedonian alliance, fuelled with Persian-paid mercenaries, and marched on the Macedonian Peloponnesian garrison, with an eye on a subsequent campaign against Megalopolis, a necessary first step in dismantling the ‘Arkadian wall’ that curtailed Sparta’s activities.

Alexander’s regent, Antipater, was campaigning in Thrace when Agis descended on the Macedonian garrison. He rushed south and met Agis just outside Megalopolis in late autumn or early winter 331, the two massive armies clashing in a battle that was perhaps the largest fought on Greek soil since Plataea in 479 (on this, Cartledge and Spawforth (2002) 21–3). The anti-Macedonian alliance was crushed, and Agis was killed (Diod. Sic. 17.63.2; Plut. *Ages.* 15.4). Alexander, upon hearing of the battle, reportedly called it a *muomakhia* (Plut. *Ages.* 15.4) – a ‘battle of mice’ – but the casualties alone, some 5300 Laonians and their allies (if we are to believe Diodorus), enfeebled the Spartan *polis*. Antipater demanded, and received, fifty hostages from the Spartan elite (Plut. *Mor.* 235b(54); Diod. Sic. 17.73.5), a concession that perhaps shaped Spartan policy until at least 317.

Upon the death of Agis III, Eudamidas – brother to Agis, son to Archidamos – ascended to the Eurypontid throne. Our sources for this period are scarce, but it is possible that the absence of Sparta from wider events was due to the absence of the fifty hostages. Though the sources are indeterminate, the

hostages seem to be still with Antipater in 330, and may have been sent on to Alexander in Asia (on the hostages, see McQueen 1978). In any event, Sparta abstained from the general Greek uprising, or ‘Lamian War’, that erupted upon Alexander’s death at Babylon in 323. There is much speculation as to why Sparta did not join Athens in this revolt, and the likely answer is that there are many possible reasons, but really only one probable: Sparta simply could not afford it. Not in men, not in money, and not in risk. Sparta became ever more inward-looking, and pointedly eschewed formal alliances with anybody. Those Spartans still of a martial bent could always sell their services as mercenaries: Thibron in Cyrene (322) and Akrotatos (son of Kleomenes II, c.314) in Sicily are the two most prominent examples (Diod. Sic. 18.19.2–21, 19.70–71.5).

Perhaps most telling of Sparta’s new attitude was its reaction to the bellicosity of Alexander’s successors, who were using the rhetoric – and the historical, cultural, and mythical associations – of the classical Greek *poleis* to contest each other’s positions. After vocally supporting Polyperchon’s proclamation of Greek freedom and autonomy (Diod. Sic. 18.56), Sparta feared the punishment of the Macedonian Kassandros. As a result in 317 Sparta built a wall. This was not a wall on the scale of Messene’s, most likely a simple palisade-and-ditch arrangement along the north and west sides of the city (Diod. Sic. 18.75.2, 19.35.1; Just. 14.5–7; on likely routes, Paus. 1.13.6), but it was emblematic of Sparta’s new status in a post-Alexandrian Greece; a small town, like many others, and at the mercy of larger forces. Kassandros, for his part, refounded Thebes in 316 or 315 (on the importance of Hellenistic city foundations, see Cohen 1995).

14.5 Areus and Hellenistic Monarchy

One of the most notable aspects of Spartan history in this period is the continual tension between the political reality of the Greek world at large and Sparta’s perception of its place within that world. Sparta still sought a prominent place for herself in a world that had moved on from inter-*polis* competition. When Alexander spoke of a *muomakhia*, he was not being dismissive of the scale of the battle of Megalopolis, he was being dismissive of the struggles of Greek *poleis* for hegemony over other *poleis*. The kings of Sparta in the third century still hungered after Messenia, they saw it as a tool to rebuild their influence. In a sense, this was both an accurate assessment of the broader political situation and a misjudgement. Messenia would provide for Sparta much-needed resources, but the resources of the Alexander’s successors and their kingdoms dwarfed anything that Messenia might have provided.

The death of the Agiad Kleomenes II in 309 sparked something of a crisis of

succession, if we are to read between the lines of our (much) later sources. Areus I was the son of Akrotatos, and grandson of Kleomenes II, and a minor at his accession. His uncle Kleonymos contested the throne, but the *gerousia* – the ‘council of elders’ that held much of the deliberative power in the Spartan constitution – maintained the linear succession (Diod. Sic. 20.29.1; Paus. 3.6.2). Following the pattern established centuries earlier for Dorieus (the sixth-century Spartan prince who attempted to found a colony in North Africa), the disaffected Kleonymos left Sparta to make his name: he went to Taras in 303, with official blessing and 5000 mercenaries (Diod. Sic. 20.104–5; Duris *FGrHist.* 76F18; Livy 10.2.1).

There were clear benefits to everyone in sending a dynastic ‘outlier’ (that is, a potential challenger to the succession) away from Sparta. Primarily, it avoided splitting support for kings and their heirs at home; but it also provided an avenue for the ‘outlier’ to make a name for himself and further Sparta’s influence.

The Eurypontid line was still the senior partner, however, and on Eudamidas’ death *c.*305, Archidamos IV ascended to the throne. Not much is known about this Archidamos, except that in 294 he was chosen, in preference to the young Areus and the experienced Kleonymos, to lead a Spartan force against the Macedonian Demetrios Poliorketes. Demetrios was landless at the time, and was seeking to use a quiescent Peloponnese (and refounded League of Corinth) as a stepping-stone to the Macedonian throne. Archidamos met the Antigonid outside Mantinea, and was conclusively defeated – the Spartan king may even have lost his life alongside those of 700 other Spartans. Demetrius then invaded Laconia, the fourth such invasion in 80 years (Plut. *Dem.* 35.1–2; Polyæn. 4.7.9–10). He made it as far as Sparta itself before troubling news forced him to withdraw – Lysimachos had taken all his cities in Asia and Ptolemy had captured most of Cyprus.

Despite (or because of) the lucky escape, Sparta continued its policy of open opposition to Macedon, perhaps due to lingering memories of Agis’ ‘grand coalition,’ or perhaps due to a broadening recognition that only a hobbled Macedon would give Sparta a free hand in the Peloponnese. Kleonymos was recalled and sent to Boiotia in 292 to bolster Thebes’ defences against the new king of Macedon, Demetrios. It is telling that, in the rapidly evolving world of Hellenistic kingly politics, one king (Kassandros) can refound a city while his ‘successor’ can threaten its destruction, all within a generation.

Kleonymos was ultimately unsuccessful, but the episode is one of a handful of hints at Sparta’s foreign policy in the opening decades of the third century. The fact that Sparta was helping Thebes is interesting for more than the historical irony, because it implies a wider Spartan engagement with Hellenistic politics, and a canny reading of the shifting politic currents. Sparta seems to be recognizing that the real threat to its interests was not the machinations of individual *poleis*, but in kings and leagues. The Aetolian

League heralded a new force in politics – that of the federal league – and it had grown into a force to be reckoned with by effectively playing one dynast against another (Kassandros and his sons against Demetrios) in the closing years of the fourth century (Plut. *Dem.* 39.2–3; also Walbank 2002).

Be that as it may, the Boiotian episode is only a hint. Our sources are largely silent on Sparta until 281. In that year, Areus begins to assert himself as the dominant (if not effective) voice in Spartan politics. He had assembled a true coalition and attacked the Aetolians at Delphi, ostensibly as a way of striking at the weakened Macedonian Antigonos Gonatas and restoring the traditional autonomy of that sanctuary. The Aetolians inflicted a staggering defeat on Areus. Sparta was spared retribution thanks to a measure of luck: the ousting of Gonatas by Keraunos in 280, and the latter's death during the Gallic invasion of 279. Kleonymos' successful actions against Troizen and Messenia probably helped give Macedonia sufficient reason to wait (Polyaen. 4.28.3; Paus. 4.28.3).

At home, however, Areus' fortunes were likely declining until his uncle's shameful action of 275. No longer satisfied with playing second fiddle, and perhaps buoyed by his military successes, Kleonymos defected to Pyrrhus – the expansionary and menacing king of Epirus who had recently fought the Romans to a near-standstill in South Italy (Plut. *Pyrrh.* 26.20; *Mor.* 219; Polyaen. 6.6.2, 8.49). The historical sources tell us that the reason was the public affair which Kleonymos' younger wife was having with Areus' son Akrotatos (Plut. *Pyrrh.* 26.16, 27.10; Phylarchos *FGrHist* 81F48) – such a public cuckolding was portrayed as the last straw for the violent and notoriously brutal Kleonymos (Diod. Sic. 20.104–5). In reality, this was just the public face of Spartan sexual politics. The shrinking Spartan elite were competing for property-bearing heiresses; Spartan law allowed daughters to inherit and dispose of property in their own right, and the Eurypontid Chilonis was one such heiress. Kleonymos was already on record as opposing the accession of Areus in preference to himself, and we can read his own marriage to Chilonis as an attempt to unite the two royal houses in his own family and supplant the claim of Areus. Areus countered that move with a sanctioned affair between his son and Chilonis (see Hodkinson 1986, 2000). The only move left to Kleonymos was either open revolt, or humiliating acquiescence.

Pyrrhus, for his part, was more than happy to help Kleonymos. He deceived the Laconians with a declaration that he was interested in enforcing Greek autonomy, and he duly invaded the Peloponnese with an army that included the Aetolians. Areus was in Crete securing mercenaries, but may have been reassured by Pyrrhus' assertion that he intended to put his sons through the *agōgē*, the Spartan education system (Polyaen. 2.29.2; Polyb. 5.19.4; Plut. *Pyrrh.* 26.8–29, 27.2; Paus. 1.13.6–8, 4. 29.6).

The Spartans were completely taken in by Pyrrhus' dissembling. Areus was

recalled too late to defend Sparta, and Pyrrhus ravaged northern Laconia before invading the city itself in 272. Plutarch tells an inspiring if overwrought tale of the heroic defence of the town at the hands of the women of Sparta, and the valorous deeds of Akrotatos. The siege was lifted, however, only when Gonatas sent an army from the Macedonian garrison at Corinth and Areus returned from Crete. Pyrrhus was forced to withdraw to Argos, where he was killed during street fighting.

This alliance with Gonatas did not last. Areus successfully wooed Ptolemy II of Egypt – the son of Alexander’s general Ptolemy I Soter, and the most successful of the successors: his dynasty ruled Egypt from 323 to 30 BC. Areus secured much-needed financial and military backing for a broader anti-Antigonid campaign. By 268 Sparta was allied with Athens and Ptolemaic Egypt against Macedonia in the ‘Chremonidean War’ of c.267–262. This war spelled the end of Areus, as he died trying to break through the Macedonian garrison at Acrocorinth to join up with his Athenian and Egyptian partners (perhaps in 265). His son Akrotatos died as king soon afterwards at Megalopolis, and Athens surrendered to Macedonia in 262, hosting a Macedonian garrison until 229 (Plut. Ag. 3.7; Paus. 1.1.1, 7.3, 3.6.4–6, 8.27.11, 30.7).

Most telling, however, was the shift in Spartan political culture that had been accomplished by the close of Areus’ reign. Areus had saved his throne only by allying with one Hellenistic dynast against another – Sparta was now fully engaged in the wider world of Hellenistic power politics, and perhaps saw herself as an actor in that wider game. Prior to Areus, Sparta was clinging to the classical model of governance, trying to enforce classical policies on a post-classical world. After the revolt of Kleonymos, Sparta entered the Hellenistic world. We can see this in Areus’ insistence on using Hellenistic modes of address in official treaties (*SIG*³ 434/6), and in the introduction of silver coinage. Not only is this the first known ‘official’ Spartan coinage, it bore the name of one king only alongside the image of Herakles (in preference to the traditional Dioskouroi). Tellingly, this coinage was probably not meant for circulation in Sparta, but rather to present an image of Areus as a Hellenistic dynast in the mould of a Pyrrhus or a Demetrios, and therefore a worthy partner for the anti-Macedonian Ptolemy II (Cartledge and Spawforth (2002) 34–6; Palagia (2006) 206–10). The third-century age of reform began with Areus, and Sparta would spend the rest of the century dealing with the repercussions of life as a Hellenistic *polis*.

14.6 The Age of Reform

Upon the death of Akrotatos, the Agiad kingship fell to the infant Areus II, whose regent was his great-uncle Leonidas II (son of Kleonymos, ruled 254–

243, 241–234). The Eurypontid king was Eudamidas II (ruled c.275–244), about whom little is known. Leonidas had spent some time at court among the Seleukids, and succeeded Areus II when he died. Unfortunately, much of Spartan history from the death of Akrotatos II in (perhaps) 262 until the accession of Agis IV in or about 244 is lost to us.

It is from 244 onwards that modern scholarship (and narrative history) on Sparta becomes dominated by two key figures: Agis IV (reigned 245–241) and Kleomenes III (reigned c.235–222). These two kings frequently overshadow the other third-century kings, and owing to the treatment of them in Plutarch's *Lives* and Polybios' *Histories*, we are relatively well-informed about how they were *perceived* later in antiquity. Plutarch uses his now-lost source Phylarchos to present something of a hagiography, while Polybios is relentlessly and unashamedly hostile. Both sources amply reward detailed readings. However, the Spartan kings are troublesome figures – and it is within their reigns in particular that we can see the origins of much of what scholars call the 'Spartan mirage' – the mythologizing about their contemporary history, and their forebears, that obfuscates much of the social history of Sparta. The kings' programmes of reform were couched in terms of 'tradition' and a return to the 'Lykourgan' roots that had made Sparta great, but these traditions were largely invented solutions for contemporary problems packaged in a historically palatable way (Flower 2002; Nafissi, this volume, [Chapter 4](#)). As Cartledge aptly noted, 'The immense modern bibliography ... may suitably reflect the objective and symbolic importance of their reigns but it is inversely proportional to our sure knowledge of them' (Cartledge and Spawforth (2002) 39).

The problem that Agis and Kleomenes were attempting to solve was essentially about population: demographic decline had hit the Spartan citizenry especially hard, especially as the citizen-training regime, the *agōgē*, seemed purposefully designed to keep people out, even if it had collapsed sometime in the 270s (Kennell 1995). More than that, however, the disastrous military defeats of the fourth century had wiped out significant numbers of young citizens. The continued reduction in Spartan territory exacerbated this problem – citizens were expected to make contributions to the common messes, and could face penalties or prohibitions for failing to meet certain minimum requirements, including loss of citizenship. Spartan military organization of the classical period depended upon agricultural produce generated from holdings in Laconia and Messenia. The loss of Messenian territory in 369 and perhaps again in 338 (if we follow Shipley 2000, 2004) was a disaster for those whose citizenship dues were contingent on revenues from farms in these areas. This led to increased inequality within Sparta, and we have no evidence of any attempts to alleviate the problem (though for a different view see Van Wees, this volume, [Chapter 8](#)) Traditional inheritance practices only aggravated the issue: all children, including daughters, could

receive shares upon the owner's death, and this led to the fragmentation of holdings (Hodkinson 2000). Only the wealthy had the purchasing power to correct that imbalance, and, as in the example of Kleonymos and Chilonis, they used strategic marriages to increase their estates at the expense of the poor.

By the 240s, Sparta was faced with the realities of a mounting demographic and constitutional crisis, exacerbated by a growing disparity between rich and poor in terms of wealth, access to land, and levels of debt. Plutarch claimed that by the mid-third century fewer than one hundred of the surviving 700 Spartiates owned land (Plut. *Agis*. 5.6–7). The alienated (and likely disfranchised) poor had little incentive to defend the rights of the rich.

It is within this context that we must view the reign of Agis IV. He was only twenty upon his accession, but we are told that he quickly shunned all of the accoutrements of Hellenistic kingship that had crept into Sparta in favour of the 'traditional' Spartan lifestyle, including bathing in the Eurotas, wearing the short cloak, and eating simple meals (Plut. *Agis* 4). He also instituted a fairly sweeping plan for reform, couched in terms of a return to tradition, and comprising debt-cancellation and land-redistribution. Agis' supporter, the ephor Lysandros, introduced this plan to the *gerousia* in 243/42. The citizen body would be enlarged to 4500, by enrolling *perioikoi*, suitable foreigners, and the 'Inferiors' (*hupomeiones*) who had lost their citizen status in previous generations. Once this was done, large common messes would be (re)instituted and everyone would live as they had in Sparta's prime (Plut. *Agis* 8). There was an element of pragmatism to this programme – Sparta relied primarily on mercenaries for her defence, and their payroll must have been crippling. By enrolling many of them in the citizen-rolls, Sparta was essentially reconstituting a compulsory citizen militia and cutting its outlays of specie.

The Agiad Leonidas II, however, barred the passage of the bill – most likely because he and his supporters most stood to lose from its passage. Agis and Lysandros followed the 'traditional' example of their forbear Kleomenes I, and had Leonidas deposed, exiled, and replaced with the more amenable Kleombrotos. By this time, however, a new and less sympathetic panel of ephors had been elected. Agis simply vetoed their appointment by stating that the will of both kings overrode all other constitutional forces if the public good was obstructed, and appointed five different officials. Agis' uncle Agesilaos was named eponymous ephor and was charged with implementing the bill (Plut. *Agis* 9–11.2–5).

Rich in land but heavily in debt, Agesilaos only supported half of the reform package – the cancellation of debts. He managed to convince Agis to introduce the reforms in a piecemeal fashion (Plut. *Agis* 13.1–2; Cartledge and Spawforth (2002) 41–47). Once the debts were cancelled, Agis left Sparta to lead an army north to support Aratos of Sikyon against the Aetolians.

Agessilaos then, according to Plutarch and his source Phylarchos, simply delayed.

Aratos of Sikyon appears to have been alarmed at the overtly communal features of Agis' regime, and perhaps feared the spread of his ideas to the *poleis* of his Achaean League, a League which – for all its democratic features – was run by and for the interests of wealthy landowners like himself. Perhaps Aratos feared what a demographically stable Sparta would do, especially under the leadership of a young and energetic king. Whatever his motivations, Aratos dismissed his Spartan allies before they could engage the Aetolians (Plut. *Agis* 14–15). The damage to Agis' reputation back home was irreversible. Agessilaos, now with a private bodyguard, had extended the official year in order to lengthen his term, and rumours were spreading that he was seeking a second term – a clear constitutional violation. Agis returned to Sparta to find the populace turned against him, and the once-exiled Leonidas II back in kingly office. Agis claimed asylum in the sanctuary of Athena Chalkioikos, to no avail. He was quickly tried and executed, along with the female members of his family (Plut. *Agis* 15.3–20.1). An unknown number of Agis' supporters joined Kleombrotos in exile.

It is an interesting development of the increasingly plutocratic Sparta that women come to play a much more prominent role politically. The inheritance practices of Sparta, which allowed elite women to amass and control their own property in suitable circumstances (see Millender, this work, [Chapter 19](#)), also likely enabled them to exert more influence on politics. The execution of two prominent elite women in the third century (Agis' mother Agesistrata and grandmother Arkhidamia) probably has more to do with women's direct involvement in politics than with any worries about rival claims to succession based on male relatives. In other words, rather than being executed for the sake of their sons, Spartan women could be executed because of their own political power (Powell 1999).

In 240, supposedly to restore exiled supporters of Agis and Kleombrotos, the Aetolian League invaded Laconia from the territory of their allies the Messenians. Little of the character of the invasion supports that justification: the Aetolians pillaged the *perioikoi* of southern Laconia, despoiling the sanctuary of Poseidon at Tainaron (Polyb. 4.34.9, 9.34.9–10). Around this time, in order to cement his near-monarchical power, Leonidas married his underage son Kleomenes to Agis' widow Agiatis in a move not unlike that of Kleonymos forty years earlier (Plut. *Kleom.* 1.1). The threat of Agis' reforms must have seemed well and truly suppressed.

This changed shortly after Kleomenes took his father's throne upon the latter's death, in 235. Phylarchos (via Plutarch) tells us that the princess Agiatis greatly influenced Kleomenes' political thinking, and he soon took up the mantle of reformer. In that same year, the Achaean League admitted Megalopolis, and its foreign policy acquired a decidedly more overt anti-

Spartan tone. Much of our information on this aspect of Kleomenes' reign comes from two manifestly hostile sources: the memoirs of Aratos of Sikyon (used by Plutarch in his life of the latter), and the history of Polybios. Even so, it seems Kleomenes inherited his father's ruthless pragmatism and monarchic absolutism.

Kleomenes seemingly spent the first years of his reign building a power base within Sparta, but events in 229 soon forced him to look outwards. After the diplomatic coup of the admission of Megalopolis to the Achaean League, a second blow followed – Sparta's ancient enemy Argos also joined. It was soon followed by Phleious, Hermione and Aigina – the old 'Arkadian Wall' was being rebuilt, this time under Achaean control. Aetolia, on the other hand, had ceded control of four towns (including Mantinea) to Sparta (Polyb. 2.46.2–3, 57.1–2).

Kleomenes needed to act to stem the anti-Spartan tide. In summer 228, he seized a Megalopolitan border fort, and campaigning in Arkadia and the Argolis began in earnest. Kleomenes was having trouble in overcoming the reluctance of the ephors at home; perhaps as a kingly counterweight to their established power, he recalled Agis' brother Archidamos, and restored him to the kingship. The almost immediate assassination of Archidamos perhaps suggests otherwise (Polybios suggests Kleomenes ordered it: 5.37.2, 8.35.3–5), but he was obviously frustrated by the influence of the ephors on policy. In 227, he removed many potential opponents by enrolling them in an expedition to Arkadia, then left them on garrison duty. This done, he dashed back to Sparta and 'removed' the board of ephors, killing four (the fifth managed to flee) while they ate dinner (Plut. *Kleom.* 7.4–8.2). After sending eighty leading citizens into exile, Kleomenes justified his actions the next day before the assembly: the ephorate was not one of Lykourgos' institutions, and was now actively impeding the exercise of his kingly prerogative (Plut. *Kleom.* 10).

The king then announced a programme of constitutional reform, a return to the 'ancestral constitution' (*patrios politeia*) of Lykourgos. Like his reforming predecessor Agis IV, he cancelled debts and redistributed land in equal shares (*klēroi*) to an expanded citizen body, composed again of 'acceptable foreigners' (likely, mercenaries) and *perioikoi*. Kleomenes' appeal to tradition allowed him to innovate under the guise of restoration. He limited the *gerousia*'s power by reducing tenure from life to a single year, and he created a new office to replace that of the ephors – the 'guardian of tradition', or *patronomos*. Given that tradition was in fact being overthrown, it is interesting that Kleomenes sought to assert the opposite in his creation of new political offices. He appointed his own brother Eukleidas as his co-king, effectively ending the Eurypontid line. He also reinstated the citizen training system, the *agōgē*, which had fallen into disuse sometime in the 270s. In order to do this, it has been suggested that he consulted the Stoic philosopher

Sphairos of Borysthenes in Asia Minor (*FGrHist* 585; Plut. *Kleom.* 11.1–4; Kennell 1995). Alongside these reforms was a general reshaping of the military: gone was the traditional hoplite spear, replaced with the Macedonian *sarissa*, a five-metre monster of a lance that the Macedonians had been using for over a century.

This new military force performed remarkably well over the next two campaigning seasons (226–5), and, more importantly, with military success came diplomatic success. The reforms of Kleomenes found favour amongst the populations of Sparta's Achaean opponents, and by 224 Argos and much of Arkadia was now allied with Sparta. Even Ptolemaic Egypt had stopped funding Achaea and was now sending money to Kleomenes (Polyb. 2.51.2; Plut. *Kleom.* 22.9).

Aratos, the Sikyonian head of the Achaean League, turned to the one potential ally he had remaining: Macedon. The old anti-Macedonian liberator of Acrocorinth now found himself in alliance with Antigonus III Doson (Antigonid king of Macedon from 229–221). Doson created a specifically anti-Spartan league to face the threat of a Ptolemaically-backed Sparta, and had himself appointed commander-in-chief, outmanoeuvring the wily Aratos. The power politics of the Hellenistic Successor kingdoms was being openly played out in the Peloponnese, with the old *poleis* acting as little more than pawns in a much larger chess game. Doson's assumption of command led to the defection of Corinth and Argos from the Spartan camp in autumn 224 (Plut. *Kleom.* 19.4–20.1; Polyb. 2.53.2–54.7). The next year, many of Sparta's Arkadian allies melted away as the forces of Doson's league advanced, despite the fact that Kleomenes had managed to destroy Megalopolis. Kleomenes was now on the defensive; he sent his mother and children into exile, and offered freedom to any helot willing to fight for Sparta (and pay the large sum of five Attic minas necessary for the privilege): 6000 answered the call (Plut. *Kleom.* 21.4, 22.3–23.1). Despite the suspiciously large and round number (we might read it as simply representing an order of magnitude, rather than an accurate census; Rubincam 2003), it is telling that in 224 there are still significant numbers of helots available within Laconia (Kennell 2003).

Early in 222 Kleomenes tried to turn the tide, went on the offensive, and ravaged the Argolis. Doson would not be drawn, and commenced his march into Laconia. Kleomenes marched to meet him, and attempted to halt the advance at the small northern town of Sellasia. Exact details of the battle do not survive, and those that are reported in Polybios seem unlikely, but Kleomenes' new-model army was almost completely wiped out, and Eukleidas was among the fallen (Polyb. 2.65–9).

Kleomenes decided it was better to live to fight another day, and fled, eventually arriving in Ptolemy III's court at Alexandria. Ptolemy III died soon after, and was followed by his son Ptolemy IV Philopater, who inaugurated his reign by having his own mother killed (Polyb. 5.67–107). Polybios depicts

Ptolemy IV's reign (221–205) as notoriously dissolute, though this is partly to contrast him with the two other 'young kings' that came to power in rival kingdoms around the same time: the Seleukid Antiochus III (ruled 222–187) and the Antigonid Philip V (ruled 221–179). Kleomenes, trapped in Alexandria, rose in futile revolt against Ptolemy IV, and died in 219 as a result. Plutarch's account is gripping, and particularly dramatic (perhaps suspiciously so; Pelling 1980).

Doson marched on Sparta town and occupied it, installing the Theban Brachyllas as governor. In a magnanimous act (and one of his last), Doson declared that it was Kleomenes that had been his enemy, not Sparta (Just. 28.4). Kleomenes' political reforms were overturned, probably in favour of recalled exiles. Sparta was also, most likely, forcibly incorporated into the Macedonian's Hellenic League and stripped of territory, only recently regained: Dentheliatis, Belminatis, and the land of the east Parnon. The kingship, which Spartans could trace in an unbroken line back to the Herakleidai, was abolished.

14.7 The End of Autonomy

Sparta remained under a Macedonian governor until 220 (Polyb. 20.5.12), after which any semblance of *eunomia*, Spartan 'good order', disappeared. Since the Antigonids of Macedon had abolished the Agiad–Eurypontid kingship the political *stasis* of Sparta revolved around the reformed ephorate. Political violence was commonplace from 220–218, as competing factions of pro-Aitolian and pro-Macedonian politicians strove for dominance (Polyb. 4.22.5–12, 35.2–5, 81.12–14; Strabo 8.5.5). It was largely to quell the public bloodletting that the ephors of 219/18 tried to restore the dynasty of Agiads–Eurypontids, perhaps using the news of the death of Kleomenes in Egypt as a pretext for a return to tradition.

The mechanism for this restoration is unclear, but the ephors chose as kings the Agiad Agesipolis III and Lykourgos, a man who may or not have been a Eurypontid. Polybios claims Lykourgos bribed his way to the position, but Polybios is hardly reliable on the motivations of Spartan politicians (4.35.14–15; cf. Poralla and Bradford (1977) 267). Agesipolis' pedigree was not in dispute, but as he was only a minor a regent was appointed, leaving Lykourgos as *de facto* monarch.

Lykourgos set about creating a foreign crisis to cement his rule, drawing Sparta into the 'Social War' between the Macedonian Hellenic League, on the one hand, and Aitolia, Elis and now Sparta on the other. This was not the first instance of using a foreign crisis and external enemy to achieve domestic unity, nor would it be the last. The Spartan king launched an offensive into the

east Parnon foreland, recovering some (but not all) of the perioikic towns which Kleomenes III had lost after Sellasia. He then focused his attention on the northern Laconian border and seized a fort from the Achaians. The new Antigonid monarch of Macedonia, Philip V, was alarmed enough to dispatch a force to the Peloponnese, shoring up Achaia's southern frontier, before invading Laconia proper (Polyb. 4.36.5, 37.6, 60.3, 81.11, 5.18–24).

Philip's invasion of 218 was calamitous for Sparta, and he marched essentially unhindered as far as Capes Tainaron and Malea. In a brilliant political move aimed at shaming the Spartan leadership, he captured the sanctuary of the Menelaion and performed a sacrifice at the site of the battle of Sellasia. Lykourgos was exiled by the ephors, though he was back in less than a year. He invaded Messenia, but wider events overtook him and at Naupaktos in 217 peace was forced upon him (Champion 1997). Perhaps as a result of the broader peace, perhaps to curtail the machinations of the ephors (who had managed to exile him once or twice), or perhaps because the fiction of a dyarchy was no longer necessary, Lykourgos had the young Agesipolis exiled and not replaced, becoming the first sole king of Sparta (Polyb. 4.81.1–10, 5.29.8–9, 23.6.1; Livy 34.26.14).

With Lykourgos' ascendancy our specific knowledge of the next ten years disappears. As the wider world braced itself for the conflict between Rome and Macedon, it appears that Sparta swore a treaty (or recognized an existing one) with the Aitolian League in 210, allying the *polis* by proxy to Rome. By this time Lykourgos was dead; his young son Pelops had succeeded him, but power was being wielded by Machanidas (Polyb. 11.18.7; Livy 34.32.1). Who exactly Machanidas was, or how he managed to attain power, is not clear – our sources label him a 'tyrant', but as Polybios is the originator of that label it tells us nothing of how he was perceived within Sparta. He may have been associated with the young Pelops, he may have been a Tarentine mercenary. He certainly liked the trappings of power, parading in a purple cloak, and he certainly pursued the old grievances with Achaia, and campaigned actively, if not always effectively, against the Achaian League. This was his undoing, as he fell in battle near Mantinea to Philopoimen in 207, alongside a reported 4000 'Spartans' (11.11–18; Plut. *Philop.* 10; Paus. 8.50.2).

Machanidas' successor was, perhaps, the most important figure in third-century Spartan politics: Nabis, son of Damaratos. Nabis was the last flickering hope for a Sparta with influence, and he came very close to succeeding, if we take 'success' to mean a Sparta with stable borders, stable constitution, and international influence. Instead, he is remembered as the ruler of Sparta who presided over the loss of its final vestiges of autonomy. The literary tradition on Nabis is almost entirely negative, drawn as it is from Polybios; Nabis had acted as antagonist to Polybios' hero Philopoimen. The Megalopolitan author is generally hostile, referring to Nabis as a tyrant not infrequently (Polyb. 13.6.1–3, 16.13.1), but it would be unfair to dismiss all

that Polybios says as either propaganda or caricature. Nabis represented, for a time, a significant threat to Polybios' beloved Achaian League; that itself warrants a close reading of what the historian says.

Livy tells us (34.31.18, 32.1), in the later debate at Sparta between Nabis and the Roman T. Quinctius Flamininus, that the Spartan considered himself political heir to the archaic law-giver Lykourgos, and to his third-century predecessors Agis and Kleomenes. Certainly he seems to have followed their example by innovating under the guise of 'restoration': he exiled opponents and confiscated their property, and expanded the citizen-roll by enfranchising mercenaries, *perioikoi*, and 'slaves' (*douloi* in Polybios; *servi* in Livy: Polyb. 13.6.1–6, 16.13.1; Livy 34.26.12, 31.11). Contemporary scholarship is uncertain whether this refers to chattel slaves or helots (Kennell (1999) 190–1 and Figueira 2004, 59 n. 93): perhaps segments of both groups is the most likely explanation. As with Kleomenes III, Nabis redistributed land to his new citizens in order to create a sustainable demographic gain – this in itself would have earned him the opprobrium of Polybios, as well as of the propertied classes of Sparta. But these similarities with Agis and Kleomenes are largely superficial. Kleomenes enfranchised helots belatedly, as a crisis measure to save his reign; Nabis, in contrast, seems to have planned that enfranchisement from the beginning. He also undertook other 'un-Lykourgan' policies: he married the Argive Apia, kept a permanent bodyguard, and embraced the regalia of Hellenistic monarchy (Polyb. 13.6.5, 16.37.3; 13.8.3; Livy 35.36.1).

As Cartledge suggests, all of these reforms were part of a broader plan to 'modernize' Sparta (Cartledge and Spawforth (2002) 70). Nabis seemed determined to drag the *polis* into the Hellenistic world, and carve for it a place of prominence. He improved the water supply, improved the defences with the construction of Sparta's first mudbrick city wall, started to build Sparta's first substantial navy since the fourth century, reformed the coinage, and encouraged trade and domestic production (detailed in Cartledge and Spawforth (2002) 71–3).

In many ways, Nabis was attempting to situate Sparta (and his rule) more firmly within the emergent practice of Hellenistic kingship. He had a palace, a bodyguard, and engaged in public benefaction outside Sparta (a process called *euergetism*; he was honoured at Delos for his activities, *SIG*³ 584). The fact that Sparta existed after Nabis as more than a monument to its past glories is testament to the success of Nabis' economic and social policies.

Polybios depicts many of these facets of Nabis' rule as cruel and tyrannical: the bodyguard is made up of murderers and thieves (13.6), for example. He even depicts Nabis extorting money from wealthy Spartans by using an automaton in the image of his wife. The machine would throw its arms around any reluctant donor, and slowly draw him towards her spiked breast (Polybios 13.7; Cartledge and Spawforth (2002) 66; Pomeroy (2002) 89–93). It is a grisly biographical detail, probably invented, but no doubt reflecting a

measure of truth. Mercenaries were costly, and Nabis' policies required money – some measure of proscription probably occurred.

For all his domestic success, however, Nabis was undone – like so many before him – by his inability to accept the reality of Hellenistic politics. His domestic policies were not about making Sparta an economically vital *polis* with the potential for sustainable growth, that was a happy byproduct. Nabis wanted a stable, wealthy Sparta to fuel expansion. Nabis wanted Messenia.

Despite the fact that during the First Macedonian War (214–205) Sparta had been allied with Messenia, Nabis invaded his neighbour in 201. The achievement of his political reforms, the near-completion of his enhanced fortifications, and his expanded military must have made it seem as if the iron was hot enough to strike. The Achaean League mobilized against him, and the following year Philopoimen, again *stratēgos*, inflicted a heavy defeat on Nabis near Tegea and invaded Laconia as far south as Sellasia (Polyb. 16.13.3, 16.17, 36–7; Livy 34.32.16; Plut. *Philop.* 12.4–6; Paus. 4.29.10). The League asked Philip V of Macedon for military aid, but he demurred.

Fortuitously, Rome declared war on Philip V in the same year. This forced the Achaeans to choose between Rome and Macedonia: they chose Rome. Argos refused to acknowledge the result, seceded from the League and sided with Philip (Livy 32.19–23). Importantly for Sparta, however, the conflict in the north distracted the League from Nabis' activities.

In a strange twist, Philip then offered Nabis control of the city of Argos, under the condition that if Macedon defeated Rome Nabis would return the city to Philip. Philip and Nabis were not at war with each other, but Nabis had been at war with Philip's recent ally. Exactly why he would offer Argos to Nabis to hold in trust is not clear. Certainly Philip could not directly benefit from Argos' support; perhaps he sought only to deny the city to the Achaeans. The idea that Philip 'bought' Nabis' support with Argos does not really hold (*contra* Eckstein 1987), as Nabis made no real attempts to support the Macedonian (Polyb. 18.16–17, Livy 32.25, 38–40). Nabis accepted, of course, and with his Argive wife Apia began a sweeping programme of debt-cancellation and land-reform that won him many admirers in the Peloponnese.

One of the features of Sparta in this period is adaptability. Nabis offers a clear example of innovation – becoming a supporter of the financially oppressed, to Sparta's great profit. The long period of plutocracy in Sparta had taught the dangers of widespread wealth disparity and overwhelming debt; Nabis seems to have realized that the policies that worked at Sparta could be exported.

It was at the height of his personal reputation that Nabis then entered into negotiations with the Romans. At Mycenae in 197, the Spartan king met the Roman consul Flamininus and sold Philip out for the price of political recognition from Rome and the right to 'keep' Argos. For his part, he provided 600 Cretan mercenaries for Flamininus' campaign against Macedon,

a force that seems to have had little impact on the final outcome of Philip's defeat at Kynoskephalai (Walbank 1940; Eckstein 1987; Walsh 1996).

Flamininus' settlement at the Isthmus of Corinth in 196 had, at its heart, a statement about Greek *autonomia* that echoed the pre-Leuktra assertions of Sparta and Persia. The particulars, however, of what exactly Roman-backed *autonomia* meant were difficult to work out, especially as Rome was not keen to remove her military forces from the Greek mainland just yet (Eckstein 1990). Nabis' continued occupation of Argos, now that war was over, seemed a good pretext. Flamininus, taking a page from the Macedonian playbook, arranged a Hellenic Congress at Corinth and declared war on a recalcitrant Sparta. A massive force composed of Macedonians, Achaians, Pergamenes, Rhodians and Romans descended on Nabis' nascent Peloponnesian empire in 195 (Livy 33.44.8–45.5, 34.22–4; *SIG*³ 595; Gruen 1984, 450–5).

The result was never in doubt. Flamininus imposed harsh terms on Sparta, though Nabis remained in control. In a continuation of Epameinondas' policy, Sparta was stripped of all her non-Laconian territory. Moreover, the reforms at Argos were reversed, reparations were to be paid, and the Spartan fleet was disbanded. The maritime *perioikoi* were made independent, and Nabis was banned from taking up arms or even concluding his own treaties (Livy 34.35.3–11, 36.2, 35.13.2, 43.1–2, 49.2). Spartan territory was significantly reduced but, importantly, Nabis' reforms of Spartan citizenship would perhaps have enabled Sparta to weather the crisis demographically – unlike the fourth century, the mechanism for citizenship was not affected.

Sparta and Lakonike were now essentially the same thing. The perioikic communities, under the leadership of Sparta's old naval base Gytheion, formed a federal league for mutual protection against Sparta, and honoured Flamininus as saviour (Strabo 8.5.5; Paus. 3.21.7; *SIG*³ 592). Nabis, however, did not accept the imposed settlement, and (at Aitolia's instigation) at the first available opportunity in 192 he invaded the territory of the perioikic league and recovered Gytheion. The Achaian League, once more commanded by Philopoimen, invaded Laconia, freed Gytheion, and effectively blockaded Sparta itself (Livy 34.36–9).

At this time, Sparta was allied with the Aitolian League, which was itself trying to build an anti-Roman coalition involving another great dynasty based in the Levant and Near East, the Seleukids. The politics are murky and convoluted, and entirely in keeping with Hellenistic precedents. Flamininus had wanted an independent Sparta to serve as a check on the ambitions of the Achaians; the newly independent perioikic communities would serve as a check on Sparta, and no one Greek state would be in a position to establish hegemony over any other. But this was a delicate balance, and one that the Aitolians sought to exploit for their own ends. They wanted Achaea in their anti-Roman coalition, and realized this could not happen so long as Nabis ruled Sparta (Grainger (1999) 437–40).

The Aitolians sent troops purportedly to aid Sparta, and when they arrived Nabis welcomed them into the city. Nabis set to work drilling these new forces outside the city, but the Aitolian commander Alexamenos, acting on orders from home, killed the last Spartan king before the walls of his own city. The Aitolians began to pillage Nabis' palace, but the shocked Spartans soon rallied and took vengeance on Alexamenos and his troops. Philopoimen seized the opportunity the disorder presented and entered the city of Sparta. He persuaded (or 'persuaded') the leading citizens of Sparta to join the Achaian League (Livy 35.37.1–3; Plut. *Philop.* 15.4). In the summer of 192, independent Sparta ceased to exist.

14.8 Afterword

The frequent campaigning of successive Spartans in the third century highlights the problems inherent in the makeup of the Lakedaimonian polity. Control of territory was seen as the first step in regaining Sparta's place in the wider world: territory facilitated the old system of *klēroi* and common messes, loss of territory helped speed decline. But it was not just territory (and successive instances of its loss) that was a problem for Sparta – citizenship and debt were just as problematic. The continued fracturing of support for Sparta by perioikic communities over the course of the century represents the slow decline of Sparta's political leverage and ability to project power. The successive waves of reforms were essentially pragmatic responses to real demographic and political crises.

It is common in historical writing to talk of *poleis* as single units, but it is important to remember that all ancient *poleis* were collections of factions and groups with divergent interests. What we call Sparta was no different – it was composed of wealthy and poor, citizen and non-citizen, slave and helot. Within these groups were often incompatible interests, and for a time religion, the authority of the kings and the relative stability of Lakonike held that fractured polity together. But this was a fragile stability, built at times on overt displays of power, cruelty, and exploitation (though for the presentation of this trope, contrast Harvey 2004 with Paradiso 2004); once the stability of Laconia was threatened, it was all too easy to pull it apart. When Sparta was dominant, it was easier for allied communities to see their own best interest as served by subordination to that of Sparta. They could see themselves as common travellers on the same road. When Sparta was no longer dominant, the partiality of the various communities that made up the broader polity came to the fore, and their paths diverged.

One reading of this period might be to say that successive Spartan kings thought that the solution to contemporary problems lay in the policies of the past. They saw classical Spartan hegemony as having resulted from the

‘Lykourgan constitution’, loosely defined, and they sought ways to move Spartan society closer to that ‘Lykourgan’ ideal of a sustainable, militarized citizenry. Modern scholarship (exemplified by Hodkinson and Powell 1999) has shown that innovation in the guise of tradition was a significant component of Sparta’s elite culture. Spartan *oliganthrōpia* was not the cause of Sparta’s decline, but rather a symptom of the fractured nature of the broader polity. Competing interests within Spartan society exacerbated those fractures. Command of resources beyond the scope of a single *polis* now determined who would be *hēgemōn*. It was only with the death of Nabis that Sparta became resigned to that decades–old fact.

Classical Thebes can be summed up in the line from the victory monument cited at the head of this chapter: ‘Thebans are superior in war’, and that was true for Leuktra. For ten years, Thebes drew the eyes of the Greek world. Sparta, however, cannot be summed up in a single episode. One of the significant achievements of Sparta after Leuktra was its capacity to renew itself, to repair fractured alliances, to innovate and adapt in the face of rapidly-evolving political circumstances, and ultimately to draw the eyes of the world for almost another two centuries.

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FURTHER READING

The history of Hellenistic Sparta is necessarily pieced together from a wide variety of sources, most of them fragmentary or contradictory. The first port of call for a general overview of this difficult period must still be Cartledge and Spawforth 2002 (first published 1989). It outlines many of the principal debates, and most importantly, the problems with the historiography of Hellenistic Sparta. On the problems with Plutarch, Duff 1999 and Pelling 2002 offer insight into how best to approach the moral biographer, while Walbank 2002 remains the best source on Polybios. A good overview of the narrative the ancient sources present can be found in Kennell 2010. The history and impact of Leuktra is well-documented, and readable accounts can be found in Cartledge 1987 and David 1981. The broader history of the Hellenistic east and the coming of Rome is aptly discussed in the seminal work of Gruen 1984, still a vital resource. Much of Gruen's stance can be seen in Eckstein, and a nuanced picture of Macedonian-Roman-Achaean-Aitolian politics can be found in the latter's 2008 work. Spartan society from Leuktra to Nabis changed markedly: the best discussions on land and its central role in shaping that society can be found in Hodkinson 1986 and 2000, and Figueira 2004. The place of the *perioikoi* is best discussed by Shipley 1997 (though Shipley's catalogue in the Copenhagen Polis Centre's *Inventory of Archaic and Classical Poleis* is more up-to-date). Ducat 2006 and Figueira 2002 dispel some of the myths surrounding aspects of the 'Lykourgan constitution' for the period under discussion. Spartan history is inextricably tied up with that of its neighbour, Messenia. For a view of this period from across the Taygetos range, read Luraghi 2008. The large-scale study by

Ioanna Kralli, *The Hellenistic Peloponnese: Interstate Relations. A Narrative and Analytic History from the Fourth Century to 146BC* (Swansea, 2017), was published when the present work was in press, and could not be considered here.

CHAPTER 15

Sparta in the Roman Period

Yves Lafond

(Translated by Anton Powell)

15.1 Introduction

Herodotos (8.123–4) relates how, after the Battle of Salamis and the sharing of the booty, the Greek generals, ‘having arrived at the Isthmos to award the prize of valour to the Greek who had most distinguished himself during the war’, could not make a decision, because each one had awarded himself first prize. However, all were agreed that Themistokles deserved the second prize. It was to Sparta that Themistokles went to get his honour: the Lakedaimonians granted Eurybiadas the prize for bravery (*aristeia*), and Themistokles that for wisdom (*sophiē*) and cunning (*dexiotēs*).

More than five centuries later, in the Flavian era of the Roman Empire, we hear of a very different contest at Sparta. Surviving inscriptions give a prominent and revealing place to *aristopoliteia*, a local competition in civic excellence in which rich Spartan families won fame (Lafond (2006) 175–80). We see that competition was still highly valued: the organization of gymnastic or musical contests (*agōnes*), in the Greek world of the Hellenistic and imperial eras, had not only survived as a collective practice essential to the cultural life of communities, as part of religious festivals, but had undergone a remarkable expansion. At Sparta, as elsewhere (Robert 1984) local contests had proliferated, with some of them accorded religious status (they were called ‘sacred’, *hieroi*). But the contest of *aristopoliteia* also allows us to see how far Greek society had subtly changed by the Roman era: the sphere in which the Greeks now achieved fame was no longer war, but civic conduct in general. Authors of the so-called ‘Second Sophistic’, such as Dio of Prusa in his *Rhodian Speech* (31.161–2) and Plutarch in his *Political Precepts* (*Mor.* 814a), emphasize repeatedly that the days of military exploits and of Greek hegemonies are over. In a society such as Greece, where warlike acts had formed a traditional and essential part of what was thought to make a man and a citizen, it was now vital to find a new definition of the praiseworthy citizen, a definition adapted to the new political circumstances (Moxnes (1997) 268–70; Goldhill (2001) 7–8). Admittedly, something of a ‘culture of war’ continued to exist in the Greek cities of the Roman Empire (Brélaz 2008; Fernoux 2011a), and we have evidence of Greeks directly participating in wars conducted by Rome. Thus, inscriptions show that Spartan citizens took

part in the campaigns of Marcus Aurelius and Caracalla against the Parthians (IG V, 1, 116; 816; 818). But the agonistic ideal was, nevertheless, reapplied, and was given a special relation to the class of notables, to those who were allowed to participate in the assemblies and to hold magistracies. It was they who now were seen as embodying civic and moral values.

This change in the functioning of civic societies is linked to a distinctive development in cities from the late Hellenistic era onwards: *euergetism*. The *euergetēs* was someone who took responsibility for paying personally, whether as a 'liturgy' (a formal obligation on the richest citizens), or as a voluntary gesture, for a good act (*eu ergein*). The act in question might be directed to the whole city or to a part of it (a deme, tribe, age group, religious association). Formal competition, aimed to demonstrate and confirm one's superiority, became at this period increasingly important. And it needed to conform to an interplay of power relations which was vast and complex (Millar (1993) 232).

In studying the Sparta of the Roman era, we are faced by a lack of balance in our evidence – arising from the overwhelming prominence of local elites in the social, political and religious life of the period. Had things, indeed, developed to the point where elites *were* the city? To understand Roman Sparta requires a study of *euergetism*, in its philanthropic, political and religious aspects, but also of the increasingly aristocratic and oligarchic nature of the city from the late Hellenistic era onwards.

Rome's interventions in Greece, and the widespread influence of Roman models such as the Senate, brought about – especially from the start of the Principate – an upheaval in the way Greek cities operated, in their institutions and their social relations. From the second century BC, the Roman idea of *census* was widely adopted, grading citizens and their rights according to the level of their wealth, and a dominant role was acquired by the 'Council' of a Greek city (*boulē*, *synedrion*, *synklētos*). Scholars have written of a 'regime of notables', in which a democratic façade barely masked the political reality, which was that political power was firmly monopolized by a wealthy elite. It would be wrong, however, to see the mass of citizens, the *dēmos*, of the Greek cities as completely marginalized during the Roman era, or to see a clear-cut opposition on class lines between the Assembly, as representing the populace, and the Council, as the voice of the oligarchs. For one thing, members of the rich elite needed the support of the people to underpin their prestige and to outdo their wealthy rivals in claims to legitimacy (Heller 2009; Fernoux 2011b).

What was the role of wider society in the communal activities which a *euergetēs* conducted? When one social group exercised such a grip over a city, could that city preserve an identity with its own distinctive values within a world dominated politically by Rome?

Our sources for Roman Sparta show above all a city seeking to exploit local ideals and traditions, whether historical or mythical. We shall see a Sparta seeking to advertise and to bring back into fashion a model of Dorian society with aristocratic overtones, one which might show the city in a good light in relation to the Roman world, to the Greek past and the Roman present. It is with Rome in mind that we may best understand how Sparta of the period chose to remember heroes such as Herakles or the Dioskouroi (Castor and Pollux), the mythical figure of the legislator Lykourgos or historical personages such as king Leonidas of the Persian War period or C. Julius Eurycles of the Augustan era.

15.1.1 Chronology and sources

In this chapter, when we speak of ‘Greece in the Roman period’ we refer to an era beginning at the start of the second century BC (if not earlier), and going down to the middle of the third century AD, and the reign of the emperor Caracalla. The starting point, then, is the time at which Greece entered Rome’s sphere of influence, the time when the kingdom of Macedon declined and perished and when the Achaean League had the chequered history which we know mainly from the writings of Polybios, Livy and Pausanias. Greek cities were then in the process of being absorbed into a foreign imperial system which was coming to dominate most of the known world. In understanding this process, whereby Greece faced Rome, evidence from archaeology, anthropology and sociology works fruitfully together. There is a *longue durée* to be perceived, and analysed especially in terms of the Greek ‘landscape’ (Alcock 1993).

Within this overall period, there are key moments of change. The fall of Corinth to Rome in 146 and the battle of Actium in 31 BC mark the end of independent military action by Greek cities. Internally, those cities begin to adopt symbols of a distant, universal ruling power. Accordingly we can see, especially in their institutions (Rousset 2004), a contrast between an ‘early’ and a ‘late’ Hellenistic period, determined by this adjustment to Rome. The great turning point lies in the second century BC, around the time of the battle of Pydna (168). Here the fall of the Macedonian monarchy ushered in what Polybios (3.1) understandably identified as the last act, the completion, of Roman conquest. After 168 the Greeks should be seen as virtually subjects of Rome. The period from Pydna, through the time of Rome’s capture of (non-Greek) Carthage and wrecking of Corinth (both in 146), to the Roman annexation of the Hellenistic kingdom of Pergamum (133), can be seen as merely sealing the predictable fate of most of the Greek-speaking world.

The Roman conquest brought a change in the traditional, binary Greek way of categorizing the world as Greeks and Barbarians. Gradually a new distinction

took over: between Romans and non-Romans. Rome increasingly came to be seen as the shared fatherland of all citizens. Greek cities, some sooner than others, saw their wealthy elites acquire Roman citizenship as a reward for service to Rome. Possession, by Greeks, of *civitas romana* is reflected in the widespread adoption in the Greek world of the Latin pattern of personal naming: praenomen + name of the *gens* + cognomen. This pattern can be seen frequently in inscriptions of Laconia, from the second century BC onwards (Rizakis et al. 2004). Latinate names in Laconia will also reflect loyalty to contemporary emperors, as in the case of the Spartan Caius Iulius Eurycles, whose praenomen and nomen are a loyalist reference to the names of Julius Caesar and his heir, Octavian.

Our terminal point for the present chapter is the mid third century, and is connected with the ‘crisis’ which developed from 235 to 284 AD, a time which coincides with a marked decline in the number of public inscriptions. In that half-century most structures of the Empire were shaken by pressure from barbarian peoples beyond the frontiers, but also through internal tensions arising from a military takeover of Roman politics. From Sparta, we have no lists of magistrates beyond the year 250 (Cartledge and Spawforth 2002). Inscriptions concerning ephebes, from the Spartan sanctuary of Artemis Orthia, apparently came to an end in the period 226–240, and Sparta ceased to mint her own coins during the reign of Gallienus (253–268).

What are the sources of information for our period? There is disappointingly little concerning Sparta to be found in the Second Sophistic, that flourishing of retrospective interest in Greek history and rhetoric which marked the second century AD and adjoining periods. Writers of that movement were inspired rather by thoughts of Sparta’s ancient opponent, Athens – the capital of elaborate speech traditionally contrasted with the ‘laconic’ brevity of Sparta (Whitmarsh (2001) 156–67; 186–216).

Apart from Polybios’ details on Sparta’s role in the Achaean League, and Book 8 of Strabo’s *Geography*, our main sources are the works of Plutarch and Book 3 (*Lakonika*) of Pausanias’s *Periegesis*. On the face of it, the works of these latter two writers are far more informative about archaic and classical Sparta than about Sparta of the Roman period. They can, however, prove revealing also about the Roman period – the period in which they were written. In an interesting reaction to this complex chronological situation in our sources, Kennell (1995) adopted a ‘stratigraphic’ approach. He studied Spartan education by relocating it firstly in the historical and cultural context of the Roman era, from which most of our information comes, before going back across the different strata of sources, towards earlier periods in the city’s history.

The limits of our literary sources mean that information from inscriptions is all the more important for Roman Sparta. And relevant inscriptions survive in some abundance; they concern every accessible aspect of the city’s history.

Most of these inscriptions are in honour of named men or women: collective memory, for Greek communities of the Roman period, was based on the praise of individuals. We can see how the particular *euergetēs* is portrayed as the focus of various social ideals, but something unexpected also emerges. On the one hand, these epigraphic texts purport to be genuine discourse of a civic community and, when stripped of all their rhetoric, they still seem to reveal evidence of a Greek city's self-awareness. On the other hand, these texts are also clearly a form of self-representation by elite individuals, who have become the guardians and the embodiment of civic ideals and morality.

In a period where the scope of politics may seem to have shrunk to that of personal ethics, it may be interesting to find traces of political interplay between Rome and Greece. These emerge if we consider the behaviour of local elites. The latter were a key element in Rome's administration of its Empire but their values remain largely determined by traditional civic structures and by community ideals with a profoundly local element.

15.2 Roman Sparta: A Political Exception?

In a passage on the history of Laconia, Strabo writes that he has decided to transmit only those things most 'worthy of record' (8.5.5). He thus mentions the state of affairs when ancient Laconia saw its first migrations. He also gives a brief mention to Sparta's policy of hegemony over others and to the mixed fortunes of this policy down to the beginning of the second century BC. But in addition he emphasizes that Sparta received very favourable treatment after the Roman conquest of Greece, and that the city was allowed at that point to keep its independence. All that was required of it was the 'duties imposed by friendship' (*philikai leitourgiai*).

Sparta's role during the Achaean War (146 BC) did indeed cause it to be treated with favour by the consul Lucius Mummius and the ten Roman commissioners who arrived in 146 BC to settle the affairs of Greece. And we know from Plutarch that it was after a diplomatic approach to Rome that Sparta was able to regain the right to its 'ancestral constitution' which previously Philopoimen (commander of the Achaean League) had abolished, and to restore it 'insofar as that was possible after so much suffering and after so damaging a length of time' (*Philop.* 16.9). As a Free City, Sparta retained full local autonomy and was thus able to play a role in interstate relations of the Greek world, while also forging links with leading aristocratic families of Rome.

Sparta's good relations with the ruling power, Rome, were reinforced in 38 BC when Octavian, the heir of Julius Caesar and future emperor, married Livia. She had connections with Sparta both through her own ancestry and

also through her previous marriage into the family of the Claudii, themselves influential at Sparta. At the end of the first century BC, Eurycles had a degree of power in the city which amounted in effect to autocracy (*dynasteia*), as witness the coinage he issued in the 20s to celebrate the visit to the city of Octavian (now 'Augustus') and Livia, a visit itself highly revealing of the favour in which the regime held the city of Sparta (Lindsay 1992; Spawforth (2012) 89). A leading collaborator with Eurycles' regime will have been the priestly family in charge of the ancient civic cult of the Dioskouroi at the Phoibaion, a sanctuary south east of the town and on the west bank of the River Eurotas, below a cliff which was the site of a sanctuary of Helen and Menelaos. (On grand building connected with Eurycles in Roman Sparta, see also Cavanagh, this volume, [Chapter 3](#)) Eurycles had the advantage of being a Roman citizen and of links with the new ruling family of Caesars – whence his full name: Caius Iulius Eurycles. He received as a gift from Rome the large and important island of Cythera, off south-eastern Laconia, apparently evidence of personal gratitude from Augustus. He was the founder and perhaps the first priest of the imperial cult at Sparta; a later high priest bears the name of Eurycles Herculanus.

Sparta, like other cities of the Greek world, had moved to honour the emperor as a god, by organizing – with the approval of the emperor himself and of the Roman provincial authorities, but as an institution specific to the city – a religious cult, not only of the emperor but also of members of his family. As new provinces were added to the Empire, each acquired its own imperial cult, with as high priest always a man from one of the leading families of the province in question. Thus in southern Greece, in the province of Achaea, the first high priest of the cult was C. Iulius Spartiacus, descendant of the eminent Spartan partisan of Augustus, C. Iulius Eurycles. The latter became a Senator of Rome, and it seems to have been he who founded the Eurykleia. The fact that this contest was celebrated and flourished until well into the Severan period (late second century AD to 235 AD), shows that an aristocratic model of thought and behaviour was well accepted at Sparta, a model which derived in large part from the way the Roman emperor himself was portrayed.

Pausanias records several political adjustments made by the emperor Augustus to benefit Sparta. Thus Cardamyle was detached from Messenia by Augustus and put under the control of the 'Lakedaimonians of Sparta' (3.26.7). Elsewhere (4.1.1; 30.2; 31.1–2) he alludes to the part of Messenia annexed to Laconia by Augustus, in the direction of Gerenia and on the border between that region and Messenia (cf. *IG V. 1. 1431*). Further, Pausanias shows that other actions of Augustus (joining the Messenians of Pharai with Laconia, the granting of Thouria to the 'Lakedaimonians of Sparta') must be explained by Augustus' concern to reward the Spartans who, with Mantinea, were the only communities of mainland Greece not to side with Mark Antony at Actium.

Already at the start of the civil wars, Sparta had joined the Caesarian side against Pompey; later it supported the triumvirs (Octavian, Antony and Lepidus) against the Republicans. The city seems to have been very keen to display its distinctiveness, by making unusual political choices, choices reinforced by personal links like those which placed the Spartans in the clientele of the powerful *gens* of the Claudii. Two of Plutarch's Lives (*Brutus* and *Antony*) record outstanding actions by leading Spartans such as Eurycles and the advantages that their city might derive from them. Thus Eurycles' participation on Octavian's side in the battle of Actium (Plut., *Antony*, 67. 2–4) allowed him both to avenge the death of his father Lachares, who had been executed by Antony as a pirate, and at the same time to contribute to Octavian's victory. It is easy, then, to see why at this time, according to Strabo (7. 7.6), Octavian gave to Sparta the honour of organizing the new contest of the *Actia*, the Actian games, established to commemorate his victory, and why also he went to Sparta in person in 21 BC and took part there in the *syssitia* (Dio 54. 7), the collective meals which had long symbolized a collective, military style of life linked to 'Lykourgan' ideals of education and socialization (Spawforth (2012) 86–102).

It is certain that these very special historical circumstances helped Sparta to preserve a semblance of political life. However, the survival of Sparta's distinctive political institutions was more apparent than real. In name the ephors and the *gerontes* lived on, officials who (with the kings, significantly *not* re-instated under the Roman emperors) had dominated Sparta in the archaic and classical periods. There is even a surviving reference to the 'great' rhetra, in a decree of consolation produced in the age of Trajan (*IG V. 1. 20 A*). In political decision-making, fragmentary decrees suggest that the role of the *gerontes* was merely consultative. The real power belonged to a college of *synarchiai*, called the *synarchia* in documents from Roman imperial times, and clearly oligarchic in character (Bradford 1980; Kennell 1992).

The terms *boulē* and *bouleutēs* are not clearly attested before the Severan period. It is tempting to accept the suggestion that sessions of the 'Council' comprised the *gerontes* and the *synarchiai* together, the whole constituting the principal deliberative and legislative body of the Roman city. If so, this would have formed a 'composite *boulē*', of which the *gerontes* formed only part, albeit the largest (the lists of magistrates usually mention twenty-three *gerontes*). As for the ephors, they seem to have retained an important, though not their classic, role in the local administration. We hear of them at Sparta itself, but also in cities of the League (*koinon*) of Lakedaimonians which had been formed in the second century BC at the time when the *perioikoi* and helots ceased to be under Spartan control. Under the Principate, however, ephors are hardly heard of, except for Sparta – and for the port of Gytheion, the last community to reflect the working of the old League. That organization had evolved into a League of EleutheroLaconians ('Free Laconians'),

following the ‘liberation’ granted by Augustus to coastal cities of Laconia, probably in reward for the help they had given to his cause at the battle of Actium (Balzat (2008) 341–5).

This insistence on traditional institutions matches the image cherished by political theorists since the fourth century onwards, of Sparta as a place of constitutional stability. Sparta had been the model, for example, of the ‘mixed constitution’ described in Polybios (Book 6). A further sign of Spartan attachment to this idea of continuity is the existence in the Roman period of important officials called *patronomoi* (‘administrators of the ancestral heritage’) and *nomophylakes* (‘guardians of the laws’). The *nomophylakes* appear for the first time on coinage issued at Sparta in the Roman triumphal period (43–32 BC), but it is unclear exactly when the office was created. However, they appear frequently in lists of magistrates, which shows the continuing importance accorded to a role which in the classical period had belonged to the *gerousia*. As for the *patronomoi*, Pausanias (2.9.1) may be wrong in attributing their creation to the revolutionary king Kleomenes III (late third century): in surviving inscriptions they are attested only from the first century BC onwards, in connection with the gymnasium and the training of ephebes.

Lykourgos himself, traditionally believed to be the person who established the fundamental rules of civic life at Sparta and to have been proclaimed a god by the oracle at Delphi (see Nafissi, this volume [Chapter 4](#)), is recorded as having been ‘eponymous *patronomos*’ on inscriptions from the second and third centuries AD. One example occurs on a dedication (*IG* V.1.541) in honour of a certain Publius Memmius Pratolaos also known as Aristokles, who is described as ‘*epimelētēs* (controller) of the *patronomia* of the god Lykourgos, the god who was *patronomos* on four occasions’. This individual, Publius Memmius Pratolaos, has therefore taken on the responsibility for discharging the duties of eponymous *patronomos* in a year when, no doubt through shortage of candidates for the office, the necessary expenses were met from income belonging to the god.

The *patronomoi* formed a college of six magistrates, one of them being eponymous (he gave his name to the year) apparently with the aid of six assistants, *synarchoi*, who are termed on an inscription of the second century AD (*IG* V. 1. 505) ‘*synarchontes* of the *patronomia*’, and of a secretary. We also hear of a *hyperpatronomos*, from agonistic dedications at the shrine of Artemis Orthia (*IG* V. 1. 275; 295; 311–12). We even have evidence, from the reign of Antoninus Pius, that some *patronomoi* were non-Spartans, evidence perhaps of how much some outsiders valued this role as a way of demonstrating their admiration for the Spartan education system.

In Roman Sparta the training of ephebes continued to be a civic institution controlled by annual magistrates, of whom the best attested are the *bideoi* (or *biduoi*: both names are found in inscriptions). The latter are, after the

gerontes, the *ephors* and the *nomophylakes*, the officials most frequently mentioned in surviving inscriptions from the Roman period. They are mentioned for the first time on inscriptions of the age of Augustus, particularly in connection with sacred banquets at the *Phoibaion*. According to Pausanias (3.11.2), the *bideoi* (named *bidiaioi* by the author) were responsible for organizing contests for the *ephebes*, in particular that of the *Platanistas*. The number of these magistrates, five according to Pausanias, is in general given as six on inscriptions, which connect them with the organization of sporting tests for teams of *sphaireis*.

The *sphaireis*, defined by Pausanias as those passing from youth to adulthood (3. 14. 6), were probably members of rival teams in a game involving a ball, small or large, known from ancient authors as a specific Spartan athletic contest (Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 9.5; Luc. *Anach.* 38). It may have been something distinctively Dorian: the word '*sphaireus*' recalls '*dromeus*', 'runner', which in Dorian Crete meant a young person who was allowed to take part in the *dromos*. The latter term meant 'race-track', a vital part of the gymnasium but also a symbol of young people's education (Marchetti 1996). In the education of *ephebes*, the activity of the *sphaireis* apparently had a special importance, as witness the many different places in which inscriptions are found referring to them (Kennell (1995) 59–63). This activity also involved a special way of dividing up the Spartan citizen population. Relevant inscriptions refer to 'tribes' (*phylai*) and groupings called *ōbai* – the latter term appearing only in connection with *ephebes* and athletics. The term is used in the 'Great Rhetra' (Plut. *Lyk.* 6.2) to describe a restructuring of the Spartiate population: there the *ōbai*, though their exact significance is unclear, form an important subdivision of the city. In the Roman period, on the other hand, we can see from inscriptions that Spartans cherished this local, Laconian term to refer to subdivisions involved in traditional aspects of education, related to folk memories concerning especially Lykourgos and Herakles.

Two other categories apparently peculiar to Sparta occur in this connection. First there is *aristindas*, a term which may mean, to judge by the related adverb *aristindēn* ('according to rank, merit'), a person chosen from the best. In the context of the inscriptions which use this term, it denotes those who distinguished themselves in the *agōgē*, Sparta's supposedly traditional education system. There is also the distinctive term *diabetēs*, found on inscriptions of the second century AD and which seems to mean someone who took on a formal role of financial sponsorship (*leitourgia*). This role was normally taken by Spartans at the start of their civic career and involved helping to finance each team of *sphaireis*.

Our evidence shows that when Spartans wished to advertise their own identity, they keenly emphasized these various official roles which they had held. A spectacular example of this is the list of posts held in the city by one Gaius Iulius Theophrastos, son of Theoklymenos: '*bouagos*, *diabetēs*, priest

of Olympian Zeus, *agoranomos* at the time of [the emperor] Hadrian's first stay in Sparta, president of the *nomophylakes*, ephor at the time of Hadrian's second stay, gymnasiarch, *patronomos*, hipparch, *bideos* four times, secretary of the Council, twice ambassador to Rome on a voluntary basis and often ambassador within Greece, member of the *gerousia* and twice president of the *synarchia*' (SEG 11. 492). This long list of honours, significantly different from the Roman *cursus honorum*, shows emphatically the great prestige which Spartan notables of the age could acquire from being granted multiple responsibilities by their city.

By preserving or creating distinctive magistracies, which gave the city a form of administration clearly traceable in the inscriptions and elsewhere, Sparta seems to have succeeded in asserting a degree of political identity. One should also note, however, that in reality these political forms reflect the will of elite individuals, who invoked traditions going back to mythical times in order to legitimize their own activity.

15.3 The Mythical Foundations of a Social Order

The image of Roman Sparta which emerges from our sources seems at first sight to give a fair reflection of the way that elite groups dominated the citizen community. We see in particular how concerned family groups were to exploit mythical material as a strategy to promote their own eminence. The present writer has studied evidence from the whole Peloponnese in this connection (Lafond 2006): from such evidence it emerges that more than any other Peloponnesian state Sparta shows a clear and extensive connection between patterns of naming and mythology.

Several texts show how the names of elite individuals can refer to figures of Spartan myth or remote history. We have, for example, several dedicatory inscriptions referring to a Teisamenos. This family name is common in inscriptions from the first century BC to the second century AD; evidently individuals of this period claimed descent from the clan of the Iamidai, distinguished for successful prophecy since the arrival at Sparta of the Iamid diviner Teisamenos before the Persian Wars (Hdt. 9.33–6). Pausanias (3.12.8) reports that the Iamidai possessed a funerary monument at Sparta, in the 'Strong Points' district (Phrouria), and devotes an excursus (3.11.7–9) to highlighting victories won by this first Teisamenos in the battles listed by Herodotos. As late as the third century AD, the city of Sparta gives an honour to Herakleia, daughter of the soothsayer Teisamenos, 'of the stock of Herakles, Apollo and the Iamidai' (IG V.1.599). Such references, though scattered, reveal a continuing influence of myth and remote history in civic life.

Personal names preserve the memory of outstanding figures from regional or local myth. They allow a Greek city to connect its institutions to a remote past, to allude to its own origins which were far older than the Roman domination under which the city now subsisted. Spartans' use of personal names also shows the importance of genealogy in defining and promoting the image of themselves propagated by local elites. Genealogies might be especially persuasive when they involved local figures, divine or human. Thus Publius Memmius Spartiatikos is presented in the era of Hadrian as 'the descendant of Hercules and of Rhadamanthys' (*IG V. 1. 471*). Sparta's ancestral links with Crete are evidently being recalled: Rhadamanthys was a Cretan hero renowned for his wisdom and sense of justice, and was seen as founder of the Cretan law code on which Greek cities such as Sparta had drawn. (According to tradition, Lykourgos's legislation at Sparta had been inspired by the laws of Crete; see Nafissi, this volume, [Chapter 4](#).)

Another individual, during the reign of Trajan, is presented on an inscription as 'a descendant of Hercules and Perseus' (*IG V. 1. 477*). This admittedly is a rhetorical commonplace in the imperial period, but it corresponds with a well-defined class of honours given to *euergetai* by the Peloponnesian city of Argos (Piérart 1992). The inscription involved is the only evidence we have that a connection was claimed between the Spartiate family of the Voluseni and the Argive hero Perseus. The Voluseni seem to have played an important role between the reigns of Claudius and Hadrian: that is, from the mid first century to the 130s AD. The Voluseni of Sparta formed marriage alliance with the Memmii (another Spartan elite family, with a name reflecting Rome's traditional aristocracy), then intermarried with families of Athens and Epidauros, as well as of Megalopolis and Lykosoura in Arkadia. Like most aristocratic houses of the Peloponnese, the Spartan Voluseni and Memmii families acquired Roman citizenship in the Julio-Claudian period. Network-building by local aristocratic families was evidently much valued. And by referring to a shared mythical figure, one honoured in more than one city, such families were apparently able to transcend ancient enmities, such as that between Sparta and Argos.

A considerable series of inscriptions from the second and third centuries AD, recording dedications, link the individuals who make them with the eminently Spartan figures of Herakles and the Dioskouroi (*IG V, 1, 477; 529–30; 537; 559; 971; 1174*) and even specify the number of generations involved. Thus, for example, Marcus Aurelius Aristocrates is descended from Herakles 'in the 48th generation' and from the Dioskouroi 'in the 44th generation'. These inscriptions strongly suggest that there was a marked tendency, at Argos and especially at Sparta, to employ mythological references in civic contexts during the Antonine and early Severan periods. Most of the relevant texts come from Sparta, and thus raise the possibility that Spartans then indulged in a certain 'abuse of memory'. In any case we see that Sparta too had its own

‘epigraphic habit’. The choice of references to history and myth made in these honorific and very public inscriptions, and the emphasis on the role within the city of certain elite-members, correspond to the requirements of Roman imperial ideology, with its stress on stability and the influence of hereditary wealth. But they may also reflect an ancient tendency within Sparta itself, to deploy claims about a remote past for ideological purposes which were eminently contemporary (see Powell, this volume, [Chapter 1](#)).

In inscriptions marking dedications at the shrine of Artemis Orthia at Sparta, there is much use of highly distinctive forms of Laconian dialect (Woodward and Dawkins 1929). Does this reveal a desire to claim extreme antiquity for Spartan educational practices, and do we have here a case of ‘linguistic archaism’ and ‘antiquarianism’ (Cartledge and Spawforth (2002) 206)? Recent research on the history of Laconian language (Brixhe 1996) shows that Laconian inscriptions from the second and first centuries BC mainly use *koinē*, the ‘shared’ dialect of the Greek world. It is only from the first to the third centuries AD that we have numerous inscriptions in Laconian dialect, and almost all of them come from a single site, the shrine of Artemis Orthia. Should we therefore see not so much ‘archaism’ as a form of patriotic and traditional piety? Kennell (1995, 90) stresses the ideological aspect of this use of local dialect, and links it to the political atmosphere in which the emperor Hadrian created the Panhellenion, a venture designed to employ traditional Greek patriotism in the service of Rome.

A statue base, dated to the time of Trajan or Hadrian and found during the excavation of the Roman portico adjoining the agora of Sparta, tells an interesting tale. It describes a woman, Octavia Agis, as ‘descendant of the founding divinities of the city, Herakles and Lykourgos’ (*SEG*, 44, 361). While Herakles is already known as founder (*archēgetēs*) of Lakedaimonians from the *Hellenika* of Xenophon (6.3.6), this inscription is the only case of Lykourgos’ being described as *archēgetēs* of the city. It is also the earliest known reference to Lykourgos in the genealogy of a Spartan aristocratic family.

Here were ways for elites of the second and third centuries to enhance their prestige in Spartan civic life. Such mythological assets could also be exploited externally. In a contemporary metrical inscription (*IG* V.1.1399) which accompanies a portrait dedicated by the city of Messene to Harmonikos, ‘descendant of Herakles’ and son of the Messenian Ariston and of Ageta, a woman of Spartan descent, is written: ‘we declare to the Greeks that we have conferred on our family a great honour by being descended from the Dioskouroi and from Herakles’. We see how mythical ancestors could be used as a privilege to be transmitted not only within a Spartan lineage but also, by marriage, to other families from other cities. A shared descent from Herakles, guaranteed by the mediation of a Spartan women, served additionally as a form of reconciliation between two families from areas long in bitter enmity,

but now peacefully coexisting under Rome: Messenia and Sparta.

Are these genealogies a particular feature of Dorian families of the Peloponnese? Elsewhere in the Greek world, Dorian and non-Dorian, there is evidence of a similar concern to claim connection with heroic figures such as Herakles. Inscriptions from Kos (first century AD) reflect the same interest in asserting descent from Herakles (*Iscr. Di Cos*, EV, 224; *SEG* 44, 694). At the oracle of Apollo at Klaros, several of the *thespiōdoi*, ‘oracle-singers’, the official interpreters of the prophetic utterances, are known from inscriptions of the second century AD to have defined themselves as ‘Heraklids’, descendants of Herakles (Robert, *Carie* II, 117.28; 30; 205.135; 382.196; *JÖAI* 15, 1912, 46.1–3; 48. 7–9; 49. 10–12). However, the position of Herakles in the mythical past of Peloponnesian cities remains distinctive. The tradition concerning ‘the return of the Heraklids’ was part of several cities’ identity. And for Sparta it gave long-valuable (if, under Roman rule, somewhat less politically correct) legitimization of that city’s ancient conquest of Messenia.

Our inscriptions boost – and intensify links within – the elite of Roman Sparta by advertising not only its noble, indeed divine, descent, but also the virtues of its civic actions. Religion is key: very often these aristocrats with their privileged connections to the gods are boasting of their civic actions in a religious sphere.

15.4 The City and its Values

Decrees, public documents decided upon by the will of a political community, are a capital source for a historian, because they reveal a society’s values. As for personal dedications, made for public consumption, they are of course highly coloured by the rhetoric of praise, but here too we can identify civic values and traditions which are being promoted.

The qualities chosen for emphasis when a community praises its benefactors derive in part from an inherited, traditional, code of values, going back to the archaic and classical periods and particularly visible in the vocabulary, political and philosophical, of fourth-century writers such as the Attic Orators, Plato and Aristotle. Accordingly, Spartan texts of the Roman period make much of *aretē* (‘virtue’), *eunoia* (‘goodwill’), *philotimia* (‘proper ambition’) and *spoudē* (‘earnest endeavour’). These terms are used to express, albeit rather vaguely, the quality of an individual, his (or her) generosity and devotion to the community. With their moral and social implications, such words effectively preserve and transmit ways of thought from earlier ages, but they also serve to promote the elites of the Roman period – and to reflect changes in Spartan society.

One such change involves the kind of behaviour which led to women being celebrated. In honorific decrees the quality of *sōphrosynē* ('moderation, self-control') is applied especially to women, and thus in effect helped the idealized image of female members of the aristocracy in the second and third centuries AD. This feminine virtue, allied to *aidōs* ('modest respect for the moral opinions of others, sense of honour'), had been part of the ideal of womanhood, especially in the minds of men, since the archaic period. But with more specifically masculine ideals, such as that of *andreia*, 'military (lit. manly) courage', careful study of the evidence suggests that there was a shift. Literary writers of the period make the change clear (Dio Chrys. 31.161–2; 44.10; Aristid. *Or.* 1.225–32; Plut. *Moralia* 813e), emphasizing that the old heroic, warrior ideal was no longer appropriate, and that instead other values should take precedence – such as self-control.

The kind of courage which we do meet in inscriptions from Roman Sparta is that involved in formal contests and in civic life generally, as in the conduct of various magistracies. The relevant texts, however, belong to a fairly narrow period, from the reign of Marcus Aurelius to the time of the Severan emperors (mid second–early third centuries AD) and concern only a narrow group of individuals, members of the local Spartan family of the Aurelii. In the Sparta of c.200 AD, it looks very much as if the choice of which ideals to promote depended on the self-image which a handful of notables wished to project. And those people, as their names show, possessed Roman citizenship.

From the vocabulary used on the inscriptions an ideal emerges of the Spartan *euergetēs* of the second–third centuries. The key qualities seem to concern religion, contests and education, as we see from the many references to gymnasiarchs who also won distinction in religious office and in magistracies. Sparta was distinctive in the role played by certain women, such as the *thoinarmostria* ('banquet organizer') in the religious sphere (Hupfloher 2000). Several of these inscriptions concerning women mention Sparta's shrine the Eleusinion (at modern Kalyvia Sochas), suggesting that the women were concerned with the cult of Demeter and Kore in Laconia and Messenia, at least in the second–third centuries to which most of the inscriptions belong.

This role of banquet organizer has been seen as a *leitourgia* taken on by women of the local aristocracy with the aim of ensuring decorous behaviour at the women's dinners, when ritual banquets were held at the shrine. The element *-armost-* in the name of these banquet organizers meant 'adjust, bring into harmony', as in the name of the *harmostai*, governors set up by Sparta in subject-cities at the time of Spartan hegemony over Greece, c.400 BC – some 600 years earlier. The term *thoinarmostria* thus had an agreeable historical resonance, accorded well with the traditional collectivist morality on which Sparta prided itself, while applying to the sphere of religion and education. Here was a case in which the ideology of collectivism was advertised, but was applied to advance the standing of a local elite.

This was not the only area in which the celebration of collectivist ideals involved a role for officials and notables which was as prominent as that for the civic community viewed as a whole. There was the festival of the Leonideia, which Pausanias describes as a local, Spartan event (3.14.1), and which we know about further from a small collection of inscriptions recording its reorganization, probably under the reign of Trajan (*IG* V.1.18–20). The Leonideia was an annual contest, for Spartan citizens only. It highlighted striking individuals from Sparta's glorious past, and so lent itself to the celebration of heroic values. We possess a dedication in honour of an individual who had taken part in funeral games celebrating the memory of figures from the Persian wars, the generals king Leonidas and regent Pausanias. This inscription states clearly that the latter were assimilated to (supernatural) heroes. But this festival may also have promoted ideology of the Roman Empire. For in glorifying Spartan leaders of a panhellenic (lit. 'of all Greeks together') war against non-Greeks, it was in line with Trajan's new policy of military conquest. Until the beginning of the second century, the Roman frontier in the east had remained fairly stable on the lines of the Danube and Euphrates; the only large-scale departure from this policy belongs to the reign of Trajan (96–117), who campaigned against the Dacians and the Parthians in order to annex new territory. Interestingly, when the writer Pausanias mentions a statue of Trajan dedicated at Olympia by 'all the Greeks' (5.12.6), he uses the opportunity to recall the military campaigns of that emperor.

The vocabulary of honorific inscriptions also focuses revealingly and often on the ideal of patriotism, in the sense of loyalty to Sparta. Significant here is an honorific title, '*hestia poleōs*' ('hearth of the city'), which applies exclusively to the feminine sphere. It is found only in inscriptions from Sparta, applies to members of the local second-century aristocracy, and specifically to women holders of religious office. It is used of priestesses in general and, especially, as in the case of Memmia Xenocratia to whom several texts are dedicated, to 'banquet organizers'. Inscriptions use other phrases, too, to invoke the idea of the fatherland or the metaphor of the civic family. Such phrases could appeal to the idea of belonging, while suggesting that the personal ambition of notable *euergetai* coincided with the interest of the community as a whole, whose existence and cohesion was happily strengthened by the goodwill of the eminent individual.

This shift in values casts a new light on the relations between Sparta and Rome as overall ruler – as we see from inscriptions at Sparta and elsewhere in southern Laconia: Gytheion, Kythera and Tainaron. Trajan is called 'Saviour of the whole universe' in a dedicatory inscription on Kythera (*IG* V.1.380). An inscription at Thouria in Messenia describes him as 'Saviour of Lakedaimon, our mother-city' (*IG* V.1.1381): this means, for the Thourians, that they thought of themselves as a Spartan foundation, but is also one of the

very few occasions where an expression of this kind links the action of an emperor with a particular community. Hadrian is given the title of ‘Saviour’ on several Spartan inscriptions (*IG* V. 1. 394; 402–3; *SEG* 13. 256), while the same title appears on a short series of dedications, in archaising style, in honour of Antoninus Pius, who is styled ‘Zeus Eleutherios [“liberator”]’ (*IG* V. 1. 407–45; *SEG* 36, 359; 41, 316). The assimilation to Zeus is achieved by inserting the name of the emperor between two forms of address customary for the god.

These communities transmit an image of the Roman emperor which legitimates the imperial cult. And that cult in turn was in effect a way of displaying civic virtues involving *philotimia*, ‘proper ambition’ – a quality which was part of the code of honour and reciprocity which the communities embraced (Lendon (1997) 166–167). The concepts of generosity, magnanimity, splendour of gesture, and concern for *gravitas*, amount to something more than the standard model of behaviour by *euergetai*, of qualities passed down the generations within aristocratic families. They amount additionally to a true ‘Laconian ethic’ – something explicitly mentioned in a dedication made at the start of the third century (*IG* V. 1. 569). Certain mythical figures seem to have symbolized this drive towards advertising a behaviour ‘worthy of the city’. Thus Penelope survived as a model of virtue, mentioned repeatedly when women are praised on epitaphs and honorific inscriptions of second–third century Sparta (*IG* V. 1. 540; 598–599, 607; *SEG* 30. 407; 409). In the third century several inscriptions describe a woman as ‘a new Penelope’. One of these women is called ‘the first young woman of Sparta’. We also meet the term ‘a new Penelope and Laodamia’.

Beyond the rhetoric, what matters here is Spartan mentality, the ethical element in these mythological references: myth gives a community a traditional way to commemorate good character. The prominence of Herakles and the Dioskouroi, for example, in references to civic qualities arises also from the fact that they are the patrons of contests and athletic training in the Greek world. As such, at Sparta they stood for an ideal of education to which belonged the ordeals involved in the *agōgē*, the system now controlled by members of local aristocratic families.

Our inscriptions show that the Spartan education system in the imperial period advertised ideas linked to *Lykourgeia ethē* (‘customs of Lykourgos’). This expression, which we find used from around the mid-second century, now apparently meant the *agōgē*, rather than the whole culture and constitution of Sparta, as it had done in earlier times. It emphasized, in this traditionally-minded community, how important were those civic functions which were linked to education. We recall that classical Sparta had distinguished itself from other cities of the time by appointing, as teachers and educational authorities, citizens, and men of distinction, rather than the slaves who were deemed sufficient elsewhere in Greece (see Richer, this work, [Chapter 20](#)).

Dedications from around the turn of the second and third centuries refer to the ‘protection of the Lykourgan laws’; we also have references from the same period to ‘advocates’ (*syndikoi*: *IG* V.1.36–7; 45; 47; 65; 554; *SEG* 11. 499; 501; Fournier 2007) and ‘expounders’ (*exēgetai*: *IG* V.1 554) of these laws. There were officials known as ‘teachers’, *didaskaloi*, of the Lykourgan laws, some of whom presented a dedication to the son of a Roman senator in the reign of Marcus Aurelius or of a Severan emperor (*IG* V. 1.500): it seems, then, that formal instruction on this subject was given to the ephebes.

Although Sparta’s educational system in the imperial period had a character of its own, references then to Lykourgos served as evocative shorthand for earlier, Dorian, traditions and to a bygone military glory. Strabo in the late 1st century BC wrote (8.5.5) that it was Lykourgos whose activities made possible the Spartan domination (*hēgemonia*) of Greece, which only ended with the rise of Thebes and Macedon.

Certain places at Sparta had a special significance for the collective memory of the community, as it sought to link moral values with educational and cultural activities. In the area around the theatre there was a concentration of monuments to Lykourgos, but also to men who had fought in the Persian Wars. It was here that were found the inscriptions concerning the contests at the Leonideia festival. Lists of magistrates were displayed in the theatre, on the walls of the eastern and western *parodoi* and on the slabs which covered the ditch around the *orchestra*. At Sparta, as elsewhere in Greece, the theatre was considered as a setting not just for shows but also for civic meetings, and so as a suitable place to commemorate public-spirited actions. The building, judging by its stratigraphy, seems to date from the late first century BC (Walker and Waywell 2001), and thus probably from the time of Eurycles. Later restoration of the stage area was done in the Corinthian style, and may be connected with an inscription of the Flavian era, which refers to a gift made to Sparta by the emperor Vespasian. There was much new town-planning at Sparta in the early imperial period, and the theatre played a central role in it.

In terms of public buildings, while it may never have rivalled Corinth or Athens, the chief cities of Achaea, by the late Empire Roman Sparta, with its marble theatre, *macellum* (food market), modern gymnasium, thermal establishments both public and private and long-distance aqueduct, had acquired most of the amenities which contemporaries thought of as characterizing urban life (Spawforth (2002) 117–25; 199–207; (2012) 220–1). Although the archaeological exploration of Sparta has advanced greatly in recent times (Cavanagh and Walker 1998; Cavanagh et al. 2009), and has shown in particular the level of private luxury in the Roman city (Raftopoulou 1998), we should remember that our overall idea of the architecture and urban layout of Roman Sparta still comes very largely from textual evidence, that is, from inscriptions and from Pausanias.

As its extensive inscriptions show, in the Roman period Sparta and its distinctive local culture flourished, as a result of the privileged treatment it received from Rome. The educational *agōgē* had been turned into an elaborate expression of Sparta's uniqueness, a symbol for Spartan society in general and for the collective values which it was proud to advertise.

15.5 Religious Practices and Civic Identity

To hold a priesthood, and especially the priesthood of the imperial cult, was a high honour. Here, then, was a sphere well suited to competitiveness and the desire to show off. The religious activities of local aristocrats were a main element in Sparta's collective memory for the whole of our period.

Benefactions offered in a religious connection had a secular advantage: they implied divine approval of the benefactor's privileged social position. And commemorating such acts was a way of grafting new social and political arrangements onto an ancient and sacred tradition, as Plutarch stressed in his *Political Precepts (Moralia, 822B)*. In a period when the *dēmos* of Sparta still managed on occasion to assert itself in political matters, as we seem to see from certain dedications made from the time of Trajan to that of the Severi (*IG V. 1. 467; 486; 541*), the grandees of the city had good reason to commemorate their own role in the city's religious life, and thereby to help preserve oligarchic influence.

Our evidence for the late Antonine and the Severan periods suggests that certain priesthoods then had taken on greater importance in the collective memory of Spartans. And these priesthoods were linked to branches of the grand families who dominated this provincial society. Cartledge and Spawforth (2002, 164) have observed that, out of thirty-four civic priesthoods recorded for Roman Sparta, all but five were occupied on a hereditary basis. And the families concerned were only seven in number. Inscriptions which tell of the munificence of local aristocrats in discharging religious duties for the community also reveal something else: the determination with which local elites got, and clung to, the control of the cults. The inscriptions frequently insist on the point: priesthoods were appointments for life, and were hereditary. And this insistence may suggest, at least to judge by the unusual nature of the handful of relevant texts, as compared with the general mass of inscriptions, that, at the turn of the second and third centuries, the level of aristocratic control had increased.

The religious practices of Roman Sparta, and the inscriptions set up to record it, helped to establish a group identity among citizens. A notable example is the ritual contest in honour of Artemis Orthia. As far as we can tell from surviving official discourse about the goddess, such as Spartan coinage which shows her with bow, shield and spear on issues dated to the late Severan

period (Grunauer von Hoerschelmann (1978) 97), it was less her warlike aspect which was emphasized, and more the value of her cult for athletic training and education generally. In celebratory dedications, those who succeeded in the contests at Orthia's shrine called themselves 'victors at the altar' (*bōmonikai*), a title held for life. These contests may be the same as, or connected with, those known as the tests of 'endurance' (*karterias agōn*: cf. Woodward and Dawkins (1929) 37). The ritual involved Spartan boys being whipped as a public spectacle until they bled (Plut. *Lyk.* 18; *Moralia*, 239; Lucian, *Anach.* 38). Plutarch, our main source for these contests, shows that they worked by elimination: the winner, the 'survivor', was the boy who endured after all the others had dropped out. Also taken into account, Plutarch suggests, was the question of which boy had withstood the beating in the most impressive way. The contest became a tourist attraction. As well as acting as a contest, with a single publicly-announced winner, the event acted as an endurance test for purposes of education and initiation. Winners were rewarded sometimes with a crown, or an official and honorific decree, sometimes by the right to place a portrait of themselves in Orthia's sanctuary. Inscriptions, and the surviving bases on which the portraits once stood, become common from the end of the first century AD onwards (Woodward and Dawkins 1929), which is exactly the period at which Plutarch gives his eye-witness account; indeed, this right to a portrait was the commonest form of reward until the beginning of the third century.

Another sign that these cults of the Roman era served to construct a sense of citizen identity is the emphasis put on their *locality*. Thus we find a dedication from the start of the third century in honour of a woman who was hereditary priestess-for-life of Artemis Orthia and of 'the divinities which have been established with her' (*IG V. 1. 602*): the Moirai Lacheseōn ('The Fates of Lottery, Destiny'), Aphrodite Enoplios ('bearing arms'), Asclepios Schoinatas ('of the reeds') 'in Helos' ('Marsh'), Artemis Patriōtis and the Dioskouroi. Together, these divinities constitute a uniquely Laconian group, organized, as the text makes clear, around Artemis Orthia, and revealing links with spheres which define Spartan identity: local topography, war, and the defence of the fatherland. This inscription is one of several which link interesting gods and heroes with particular Laconian sites. Cults are sometimes mentioned with their site, 'In the Marsh', 'at Pleiai'; divine figures may also be assigned titles which refer to place. Also interesting is the frequent and prominent reference to the role of local aristocratic women in Spartan cult of the Roman Imperial age (Pomeroy 2008). Here too we may have genuine continuity in Spartan practice: Spartan women are recorded as having played an unusually prominent role, by Greek standards, in their city's politics during the classical and especially the Hellenistic eras (see Millender, this work, [Chapter 17](#)).

The prominence of the Dioskouroi, in the sources for Spartan religion at our period, suggests a desire to emphasize things which helped to establish not

only a Spartan identity but one which supposedly predated the Dorian Invasion. A similar motive helps to explain the stress laid on Amykai, a village which, according to Spartan tradition, was one of the five divisions (*ōbai*) forming the original city of Sparta, and close to which was established an important temple of Apollo. It also seems that the desire to assert a local, Spartan identity was especially pronounced in the Severan period. The evidence for this is a series of inscriptions which spans the period from the end of the first to the start of the third century AD, and where we read of the winning ball-players, *sphaireis*, from different Spartan tribes, in the competition between the *ōbai*. One of these texts (*IG V. 1. 675*), surmounted by sculpted images of the Dioskouroi and dating from the third century, refers to the young people of Pitane, the district where the sanctuary of these divine Twins was situated. This may suggest that, while for Greeks generally the Dioskouroi symbolised Sparta, Spartans themselves saw them as representing Pitane in particular. Two further inscriptions, from the first half of the third century and thus quite close in date to the one just mentioned, show that there was a sacred contest called the Dioskoureia. Its scope seems to have been strictly local; no participants are recorded from outside Sparta. It may have been connected with the cult of the Dioskouroi which was served by members of the Memmii clan. An honorific inscription from the same period mentions a hereditary priestess-for-life of the Dioskouroi, with responsibility for this contest (*IG V. 1. 601*).

The Leukippides, as wives of the Dioskouroi, were themselves objects of cult at Sparta. Pausanias refers to their sanctuaries there (3.12.8; 16.1). A dedication has also survived from the shrine of Artemis Orthia, dating from around 200 AD (*IG V. 1. 305*) and written in markedly Laconian dialect, which refers to a 'priest of the Leucippides and the Tyndarides'. That the Dioskouroi continued at Sparta to be worshipped as heroes marks Sparta off from the rest of Greece. In the rest of the Hellenic world images of the twins as heroes virtually disappeared from the Hellenistic period onwards. Instead, the Dioskouroi were worshipped very widely in Greece as gods, and a new iconography was therefore required: they were shown with star and *pilos* (a felt bonnet, cylindrical but without side-pieces; see *LIMC*, s.v. 'Dioskouroi', 590).

For Roman Sparta, the late Antonine and the Severan periods (from the last third of the second century to the first decades of the third century) marked an intense attachment to the city's mythical past, with gods and heroes used to emphasize local qualities. While our inscriptions reflect much self-advertisement by elite citizens who sponsored the local cults, we also seem to see a principled insistence on religious features which were unique to Sparta. Why? Part of the explanation is general: Spartans inherited, from traditions going back centuries into their past, a belief in their own difference and superiority as compared with other Greeks. That mentality is very clear from

the early classical period, with the insistence, for example, on referring to all non-Spartan outsiders as *xenoi* (see, for example, [Chapter 10](#) by Lupi in this volume). The pro-Spartan Xenophon trumpets the idea at the start of his *Constitution of the Lakedaimonians* (1.1). Spartans in the Roman period may have emphasized, exaggerated and even invented aspects of their distinctive past (Kennell 1995; Cartledge and Spawforth (2002) 176–95). But such plastic treatment of the past, to meet contemporary needs, was itself an enduring, indeed a distinctive, element of earlier, classical and Hellenistic Sparta. Roman Sparta, it may seem, preserved a genuine tradition of archaizing falsification.

There was, however, a particular incentive for Sparta, in the period of the high Roman Empire which we have identified, to assert its traditions with fervour. Roman imperial policy, which had done so much since Augustus' time to preserve the fabric, the morale and the traditions of Sparta, had evolved a policy intimately affecting Greece and implicitly tending to play down Sparta's uniqueness. Hadrian preached panhellenism: Greeks together, implicitly against barbarians of the east. The emperor created in 131/2 the Panhellenion, a political and religious structure intended to gather all the Greeks of the Greek mainland and the wider Hellenic world, and to play down differences (Doukellis 2009). Each city was to be represented by a single delegate, a 'Panhellene'. And the organization's headquarters was at Athens – in marked contrast to the 'panhellenic' wars against Persia of 480–79 BC, which had been fought under Spartan command. Such developments and (to re-apply a phrase of Tacitus) 'the fear of worse to come' may very well have helped to provoke the long spasm of proud particularism which we have identified in Roman Sparta.

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Cover Image: Interior of a cup depicting the hunt for the Boar of Calydon, Laconian, c.560 BC (ceramic), Greek, (6th century BC) / Louvre, Paris, France / Bridgeman Images



Map 1 Mainland Greece and the Aegean world, at the time of Sparta's greatest power, c.400 BC

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PART IV

Culture, Society and Economy: The Classical Period and Beyond

CHAPTER 16

Spartan Religion

Michael A. Flower

16.1 What is Spartan Religion?

The historian Thucydides tells us that in c.427 BC the Spartans restored their exiled king Pleistoanax, ‘with the same dances and sacrifices with which they had instituted their kings upon the first settlement of Sparta’ (5.16.3). Without the slightest hesitation a modern reader of this passage would label this procedure a ‘religious ritual’; but one must be cautious in taking the further step of assuming that this ‘ritual’ (whether genuinely ancient or invented at the time) was part of a self-contained domain that we can call ‘Spartan religion’. Was there really such a thing as Spartan religion and, if there was, what kind of thing was it? The answer to that question might seem obvious or even trivial. There is an overwhelming body of evidence that the Spartans, like all other Greeks, believed in the existence and power of supernatural beings, whom they called gods and heroes, and that they built temples and hero-shrines and celebrated festivals in order to honour and appease such beings. But the question at issue here is not whether the Spartans engaged in activities and held beliefs that we would label ‘religious’. Rather, given that the Greeks had no single term that corresponds to our word ‘religion’, the point of the question is how to demarcate the boundaries of the phenomenon under investigation.

Most studies of Greek and Roman religion begin without offering any sort of working definition of what religion is or what it does (which may or may not be the same thing), as if it were perfectly obvious what Greek or Roman ‘religion’ consisted of. It is true that scholars in the fields of Religious Studies, Anthropology, and Sociology have failed to formulate a universal definition of religion that has won general acceptance. That is why anthropologists, in particular, tend to describe the religious systems of particular communities and to shy away from sweeping comparisons between systems. Nonetheless, definitions *are* important. As Thomas Tweed has cogently argued (2006: 53), ‘We are stuck with the category *religion*, since it fixes the disciplinary horizon, and our use of it can be more or less lucid, more or less self-conscious. So we are obliged to be as clear as possible about the kind of definition we are offering and the orienting tropes that inform it.’

It is far beyond the scope and purposes of this chapter to propose a definition either of ‘religion’ broadly speaking or even of ‘Greek religion’ more

narrowly. Rather, I am going to propose a stipulative definition of Spartan religion. By 'stipulative' I mean a definition that is not necessarily true in the sense of corresponding precisely to some external reality, but one that will be useful for this particular study and that will help us to delineate the constitutive horizons of 'Spartan religion'. My definition combines what Spartan religion is (an intellectualist definition) with what it does (a symbolist or functionalist definition). The rest of this essay will then tease out the implications of this definition, filling out the details with concrete examples. I have elsewhere argued that Spartan religion was distinctive in relation to the religious systems of the other Greek *poleis*, and in particular to that of Athens (the only other Greek city about whose religious practices we have a large amount of evidence). I here concentrate, therefore, on giving a broad, mostly non-comparative, descriptive and analytical treatment of the Spartan system.

Before offering a definition, however, some methodological difficulties must be addressed. The most serious pertains to the nature of the literary evidence that survives. On the face of it, our sources for Spartan religion are rich, even though there is no extant source that addresses religious practices as its primary concern. During the classical period (fifth and fourth centuries BC), the historians Herodotos, Thucydides and Xenophon all knew Spartans and most probably had visited Sparta. The third book of Pausanias' *Guide to Greece* details the temples and sacred spaces to be seen in the Sparta of his day (late second century AD). Plutarch, in several of his *Lives*, and especially in his life of the lawgiver Lykourgos, has much to tell us about Spartan religion. The difficulty lies in the fact that the evidence ranges in date from the fragmentary works of the Spartan poets Tyrtaios and Alkman, composed in about 650 and 600 BC respectively, to Plutarch's biographies written in the first or second century AD and Pausanias' travelogue of the late second century AD. Although Plutarch and Pausanias consulted earlier sources, their perspective, as indeed their autopsy of monuments and rituals, is that of their own eras (when Greeks living under Roman dominion idealized their classical past). Is it legitimate to combine the information from all of these authors and texts in order to give a synthetic and synchronic account of Spartan 'religion'? Or should one attempt to give a diachronic account, attempting, in so far as possible, to document change and innovation over time? Or, ideally, might it be possible, by using great care in the evaluation of evidence, to do both simultaneously?

It is essential to realize that Spartan society was not static, but was subject to a constant process of reinvention and renegotiation as new customs were attributed to Lykourgos and older customs discarded as being un-Lykourgan. Every time the Spartans made a change or innovation they explained it as a return to what Lykourgos had originally intended. That is why, both in the study of religion and of all other Spartan institutions and customs, extreme care must be taken not to combine evidence indiscriminately that comes from

different historical periods (Flower 2002). Cultural phenomena that have every appearance of being old and traditional may in fact be ‘invented traditions’ of quite recent date. Some innovation would have been incremental; but there were also times of concentrated and radical change, the most important example perhaps being the reforms of King Kleomenes III in 227 BC, which included a redistribution of land, the creation of new citizens, and the recreation of the lapsed public education and common messes. Another moment of radical transformation occurred in the mid-second century BC. In 189 Sparta was forced into the Achaian League and was compelled to adopt an Achaian-style constitution; but a generation later, in 146, the Spartans once again revived their ‘ancestral constitution’ with newly recreated Lykourgan customs. And there were further episodes of reinvention during the Flavian period (AD 69 to 96).

By the time that Plutarch and Pausanias visited Sparta the city had become a tourist attraction and so-called Lykourgan customs served no practical purpose other than the entertainment of tourists and the promotion of civic pride (Cartledge and Spawforth 1989, 190–211). One cannot get around this obstacle by assuming that religious institutions and practices are somehow more static and more resistant to innovation than other social practices. In fact, no religious system is static, and polytheistic systems are especially open to innovation and are highly permeable by external influences (Humphreys 2004, 223–75). Even leaving aside the dual phenomena of ‘invented traditions’ and self-conscious archaism, religious practices and institutions at Sparta, as elsewhere in the Greek world, evolved in tandem with political and social change. So my method will be to combine the effort to create a composite picture that is informed by insights and methods from cultural anthropology with an historical approach that looks for evolution and transformation over time.

In what follows I am going to concentrate on the period from roughly 600 to 200 BC. The discussion will be limited to the religion of the full citizens, or Spartiates (Spartans for short), and will not examine that of the subordinate classes: the *perioikoi* (who were free-born individuals from nearby communities) and the helots (who were unfree labourers). The Spartiates and *perioikoi* together formed the ‘Spartan’ army and were collectively known as ‘Lakedaimonians’. I am concentrating on the religion of the elite (‘Spartan’ religion as opposed to ‘Lakedaimonian’ or ‘helot’ religion) out of necessity, since there is so little evidence for the religious organization and practices of subordinate groups (even if *perioikoi* and Spartiates undoubtedly shared access to some of the same sanctuaries and festivals throughout Laconia).

A useful working definition of Spartan religion might be formulated as follows. Spartan religion comprised the nexus of interconnected beliefs, practices, and rituals that explicitly served to negotiate the relationship between the natural and supernatural worlds. That relationship, as elsewhere

in the Greek world, was conceived of in terms of reciprocity (an ongoing exchange of voluntary, if socially prescribed, favours – mortals offering sacrifice and prayer in exchange for all those things which make for a good life, both privately and collectively). These beliefs, practices, and rituals also validated, legitimized, and sustained social and political structures and hierarchies, while at the same time inculcating Spartan values and ideals. Religion functioned as a highly persuasive means of generating social cohesion and of social control, simultaneously conditioning and limiting the behaviour of all Spartiates. This state of affairs came about neither by accident nor by the conscious design of a particular lawgiver. Rather, Spartan religion was uniquely adapted to Spartan social and political institutions, and evolved in tandem with those institutions. Although religious beliefs, practices, and rituals did not form a separate domain, but were embedded within other aspects of human experience, they nevertheless, taken together, formed a coherent system that played a significant role in the long-term success of Sparta as a cohesive community.

16.2 Belief

The claim that the Spartans believed in the existence of supernatural beings, that is in gods and heroes, who intervened in human affairs, should in no way be surprising. Indeed, the burgeoning field of cognitive science claims as a basic premise that, ‘The explanation for religious beliefs and behaviours is to be found in the way all human minds work’ (Boyer 2001, 1–4). It is a natural and universal feature of human psychology to attribute cause and effect to the activities of supernatural agents. Greek religion generally was based on a set of three interlocking and fundamental beliefs: that the gods exist, that they take an interest in human affairs, that there is reciprocity between humans and gods (Yunis 1988, 38–58). Nonetheless, the particular ways in which these three basic beliefs were conceptualized and acted upon will have had their own particular Spartan flavour and emphasis.

Spartans’ religious belief seems to have placed a very strong emphasis on what we would call ‘following the rules’, and that goes far to explain, on the religious level, why they were so inclined to delay military action rather than postpone a festival or ignore an omen. This is not to rule out the parallel and complementary motive of using piety as a pretext for action or indeed for inaction – it is merely to suggest that it was a ‘pretext’ that was preeminently suited to the way that the Spartans viewed the reciprocal relationship between themselves and their gods. In a famous passage Herodotos explains the Spartan decision to obey the Delphic oracle and to expel the Peisistratidai (the tyrant Hippias and his family) from Athens in 510 BC, despite close ties of guest-friendship, because, as he inferred, ‘they put the things of the god above

the things of men' (5.63). Likewise in 479 BC the Spartans could not march out to fight Mardonios because they were celebrating the Hyakinthia, and 'they considered it of utmost importance to prepare the things of the god' (9.7). So too Xenophon felt the need to highlight the privileged place that religious observance played in understanding Spartan actions. During a Spartan campaign against Corinth in 390 BC, King Agesilaos sent the soldiers from Amyklai home because 'the people of Amyklai, whether they are on campaign or for any other reason are away from home, always return for the Hyakinthia in order to sing the paian' (*Hell.* 4.5.11).

The Hyakinthia was not the only festival that could cause the postponement of urgent military operations (Goodman and Holladay 1989). It was perhaps the Karneia (Hdt. 6.106) that kept the Spartans from arriving in time for the battle of Marathon in 490, and it was explicitly that festival that prevented them from sending a larger force with Leonidas to Thermopylai in 480 (Hdt. 7.206). Although during the Karneia all Dorians were supposed to abstain from war (Robertson 2002, 36–4), the Spartans seemed to have adhered to this custom with far greater punctiliousness than other Greeks. The Gymnopaidiai too could keep them from leaving the city. Thucydides reports (5.82) that in 417 the Argive democrats waited for the celebration of the Gymnopaidiai before attacking the oligarchs who were in power and that the Spartans delayed giving assistance to their friends at Argos. They did eventually postpone the festival, but by then the oligarchs had been defeated. Thucydides, unlike Herodotos, does not explicitly comment on Spartan piety, and he leaves Argive and Spartan motives implicit. Yet it is clear enough to the reader that the Argive democrats were attempting to exploit a well-known feature of Spartan behaviour.

In the early fourth century BC the Argives once again tried to take advantage of Spartan religious scruple by adjusting their calendar and pleading the sacred months whenever the Spartans were about to invade their territory. The Spartan king Agesipolis consulted the oracles at both Olympia and Delphi in 388 BC about breaking this specious religious truce that was being offered by the Argives (*Xen. Hell.* 4.7.2). The religious issue at stake was so delicate that Agesipolis took the highly unusual step of verifying the first response: when he received the answer that he wanted at Olympia, that it was *hosion* ('permitted by divine law') not to accept a truce that was unjustly offered, he asked Apollo if he agreed with his father. Agesipolis' tactic came very close to being a trick, if not an actual test of oracular veracity; yet it was a trick grounded in a real belief that divine opinion mattered (Flower 2008, 151). Religion can be a powerful tool in the hands of potential manipulators, but there are always strict limits to manipulation when those involved believe in and live by the ideas that they are manipulating (Horton 1993, 55).

In general terms, divine sanction for both political and military action seems to have been more important to Spartans than to any of the other Greeks. The

surest way of seeking and obtaining divine approval and guidance for action was through the various rites of divination. Although most Greeks believed that the gods communicated with mortals through signs that could be interpreted by experts (whether by mobile seers who travelled with armies or by a prophet at a fixed shrine such as the Pythia at Delphi), the Spartans may have been more ready than most to call off military expeditions due to unfavourable omens (Parker 1989; Flower 2008; Powell 2010). It may be significant that only for Sparta do we have evidence for the border-crossing divinatory sacrifice called *diabatēria*. Here Spartans were at one end of a spectrum: if all Greeks depended on divine signs both for aid in reaching decisions and for validating decisions already made, the Spartans did so to an exceptional degree.

One could cite many other examples of religion intruding into the domains of politics and warfare, but all would point in the same direction – that the Spartans had a reputation for taking ‘religion’ especially seriously. How might this situation have come about? On the theoretical level, Spartan society’s emphasis on discipline, orderliness, and strict obedience to authority is mirrored in their relationship with their gods (Parker 1989, 162). On the level of social function, it is surely not a coincidence that the three most important festivals at Sparta fell in the order Hyakinthia (late spring/early summer, lasting three days), Gymnopaïdai (midsummer, lasting three to five days), and Karneia (late summer, lasting nine days). Whether by accident or design, the temporal placement of these festivals, in combination with the necessity of being present in Sparta to celebrate them, limited both the duration and the distance of Spartan military expeditions during the height of the campaigning season. (This may have had something to do with the fear of leaving Laconia unprotected in the presence of the large helot population.) Religion, therefore, evolved into a device for moderating and controlling the Spartan military ethos (the very ethos that religious rituals helped to create), while simultaneously generating the social cohesion that made that ethos both acceptable and durable.

If it were simply a matter of religious observances keeping the Spartans from doing certain things, one might suspect that they were somehow using religion as a mere pretext or excuse for not doing what they did not really want to do in any case (such as march out beyond their own borders on military campaigns). Yet the surest sign that the Spartans took their religious pronouncements seriously is the readiness with which they attributed their own misfortunes to religious causes, and in particular to divine displeasure. Moreover, their misfortunes were not explained in terms of ritual errors (such as is often the case in polytheistic societies), but, quite remarkably, in terms of moral lapses. Fear of divine retribution for the Spartans’ sacrilegious killing of Darius’ envoys in 490 BC apparently motivated their extraordinary action of sending two heralds to Xerxes’ court in order to expiate the wrath of

Agamemnon's herald Talthybios (Hdt. 7.134). A few years before the earthquake that levelled the city in c.465 BC, the Spartans expelled some helot suppliants from the temple of Poseidon at Tainaron and then slew them, 'on account of which action they indeed believe that the great earthquake in Sparta befell them' (Thuc. 1.128.1). By 414 BC the Spartans were blaming themselves for their misfortunes in the Archidamian War because they had refused arbitration in 432, the implication being that they had provoked the wrath of the gods against themselves as oath-breakers (Thuc. 7.18). Finally, it is possible that Xenophon's explanation (*Hell.* 5.4.1 and 6.4.3) for the catastrophic military defeat of the Spartans at the battle of Leuktra in 371 BC (because the gods had punished them as oath breakers for their impious and illegal seizure of the Theban Kadmeia in 382) reflects the explanation advanced by the Spartans themselves. Or to put it a bit differently, Xenophon's emphasis on the religious cause for the collapse of the Spartan hegemony would have been intelligible to the Spartans collectively.

When it comes to questions of personal piety as opposed to collective behaviour (or even of collective belief), there is one Spartan who deserves special mention. It was King Agesilaos II (reigned c.400–360) who was most conspicuously depicted, and who self-consciously depicted himself, as a paragon of scrupulous behaviour in matters of concern to the gods. Several passages in Xenophon's encomium *Agesilaos* (2.13; 3.2; 11.1–2) testify to the image that the king wished to project of himself as a person of exceptional and consistent piety, and this was certainly part and parcel of his self-representation as a model Spartan. As part of Xenophon's summing up of Agesilaos' virtues, we are told that (11.2), 'He never stopped repeating that he believed that the gods took no less pleasure in deeds that were holy [*hosia*: permitted to men by the gods] than in sacrifices that were pure [*hagna*: dedicated to the gods].' Xenophon is complicit in constructing a particular image of the king as someone who acted according to a specific set of paradigmatic religious convictions, which include not breaking one's oaths, plundering temples, using force on suppliants, or disregarding omens from sacrifice. Even if we cannot know what Agesilaos truly believed (or indeed whether he truly was god-fearing), we at least have access to how he represented his beliefs to his contemporaries.

16.3 Sacred Space

In a famous passage (1.10), Thucydides, the historian of the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BC), accurately predicted that if Sparta were ever deserted, future generations would hardly believe that her power had been equal to her

fame given the lack of expensive temples and buildings, whereas if Athens should suffer the same fate, on the basis of the visible remains they would conjecture the city's power to have been twice as great as it actually was. The most stunning temple on the Athenian acropolis, the Parthenon, hardly needs to be described, since it has become an icon of Greek culture. In sharp contrast the most famous temple on the Spartan acropolis, the temple of Athena Chalkioikos ('Athena of the Bronze House'), built in the sixth century BC and so named because of the engraved bronze panels that lined its inner walls, was constructed of limestone and its foundations reveal a structure of paltry dimensions. The sanctuary of Artemis Orthia, situated on the west bank of the river Eurotas, was hardly more impressive.

As Thucydides warned, however, we should not equate material grandeur with power. Even if never physically impressive by Greek standards, sacred space was enhanced and enlarged as Sparta grew in power and prosperity. Moreover, the city was guarded on all sides by her gods. Two colossal archaic statues of an armed Apollo, each holding a spear in one hand and a bow in the other, protected the five villages that constituted the *polis* of Sparta. One statue was at the village of Amyklai, about five kilometres to the southwest of the other four villages (which were much closer to the Spartan acropolis). Being some 45 feet high (Paus. 3.19.2–3), it was visible for a considerable distance; it stood upon a magnificently decorated throne and its base was an altar containing the tomb of Hyakinthos. The other statue, its twin, was at Thornax just to the north of the city (Paus. 3.10.8). A few kilometres to the southeast of Sparta, situated on a hilly ridge overlooking the Eurotas valley, stood the most impressive ancient monument that is still to be seen in Laconia, the Menelaion, the shrine to Menelaos and Helen who were worshipped as gods. It is located at Therapne, where the Dioskouroi (Kastor and Polydeukes), Helen's brothers, were said to live under the earth.

The sixth century BC was the most important period of construction for the archaic and classical city: all of the sanctuaries mentioned above (except the Menelaion) were then rebuilt on a much grander scale. This investment in religious infrastructure surely reflects the success of the political and social changes that were taking place at the same time. Although the details are controversial, the period from 650–550 BC witnessed the emergence of Sparta as a militarized society with a distinctive way of life and form of government. (For a different, later, dating of this process, see [Chapters 8 and 9](#) by Van Wees, this volume.) The sanctuary of Artemis Orthia, in particular, which acquired its first all-stone temple in the first half of the sixth century, became a chief locus for the rites of passage and initiation that were connected with the public upbringing (the *agōgē*) of the young, both male and female. Males, in particular, between the ages of seven and twenty were distributed for educational purposes into age-categories and annual age-classes (Ducat 2006, 69–117).

As for the Menelaion, at the beginning of the fifth century it was significantly enhanced by the incorporation of a rectangular terrace (at least five metres high). This is probably to be connected with the victory under Spartan leadership over the Persians at Plataia in 479 BC, the decisive victory in the Persian Wars. Menelaos was the King of Sparta at the time of the Trojan War, and that war almost immediately came to be seen as the mythical analogue of the Persian Wars. Indeed, Simonides of Keos, in the recently published fragments of his elegy on the battle of Plataia (fr. 11, lines 29–32 Flower/Marincola), writes that the Spartan army ‘leaving behind the [Eur]otas and the city of [Sparta], [set out] with the horse-taming sons of Zeus [the Tyndarid] heroes and mighty Menelaos ... leaders of their ancestral city’.

16.4 World–View, Ethos, and Key Symbols

The reference to the two huge armed statues of Apollo who guarded the territory of Sparta raises an interesting question. Many religions employ ‘symbols’ that are so common and pervasive as to hardly need comment: the cross, the Menorah, and the seated or standing Buddha are all obvious examples. Religious symbols are important not least because of the role that they play in negotiating between a people’s world-view (their base notions of how reality is put together) and their ethos (their general style of life and values). Religious symbols serve to link world view and ethos in such a way that they mutually confirm each other (Geertz 1968, 97): ‘Such symbols render the world view believable and the ethos justifiable, and they do it by invoking each in support of the other. The world view is believable because the ethos, which grows out of it, is felt to be authoritative; the ethos is justifiable because the world view, upon which it rests, is held to be true.’

It may be debatable whether or not the Spartans had a completely different world-view from other Greeks. I believe that they did in so far as they saw themselves as possessing the city of Sparta by divine right (Tyrtaios fr. 2 Gerber) and as being the legitimate heirs to the kingdom of Agamemnon in the Peloponnese. This claim is reflected in a broad range of texts and monuments. The poets Stesichoros and Simonides, in sharp contrast with Homer and Attic tragedy, placed Agamemnon’s palace in Sparta (frs. 216 and 549 respectively in Campbell), and Pindar situated it in nearby Amyklai (*Pythian* 11. 16, 31–6; *Nemean* 11.34) where Pausanias saw Agamemnon’s tomb. According to Herodotos (1.67–8), the Spartans went to considerable trouble to acquire the bones of Agamemnon’s son Orestes (Boedeker 1993). It was also an integral component of the Spartan world-view that their laws and customs had been validated, if not actually prescribed, by Delphic Apollo and that the fidelity to those laws ensured both their survival as a community and their superiority to other peoples (see below).

However that may be, it is at least clear that the Spartans had a distinctive ethos that was based on a collective mentality, similarity of lifestyle, communal institutions, and martial values. It was also a competitive ethos: the nominal equality of all Spartan citizens coexisted with differences in wealth and status in a society that encouraged a lifelong competition for honour, achievement and rank (Hodkinson 2000). What kind of religious symbol, one that served to link world-view and ethos, might we look for in the case of a society like this one? In a very influential article, the anthropologist Sherry Ortner (1973, 1339–40) defined the type of symbol that it would be instructive to find among the Spartans:

Summarizing symbols, first, are those symbols which are seen as summing up, expressing, representing for the participants in an emotionally powerful and relatively undifferentiated way, what the system means to them. This category is essentially the category of sacred symbols in the broadest sense, and includes all those items which are objects of reverence and/or catalysts of emotion – the flag, the cross, the churinga, the forked stick, the motorcycle, etc. ... And this is the point about summarizing symbols in general – they operate to compound and synthesize a complex system of ideas, to ‘summarize’ them under a unitary form which, in an old-fashioned way, ‘stands for’ the system as a whole.

What would such a summarizing symbol be for the Spartans? Several possible symbols come to mind that would have had a special significance for Spartans. Two symbols closely associated with the warrior ethos would be their red cloaks worn in battle and with which they were buried, and the shield with the Greek letter Lambda (Λ) as its emblem, standing for ‘Lakedaimonioi’. A specifically religious symbol is the *dokana*, which is a wooden aniconic representation of the Dioskouroi (Kastor and Polydeukes). It is described by Plutarch (*Mor.* 478a–b) and depicted on a marble Laconian relief of the fifth century BC (Tod and Wace 1906, 113–18 and 193, fig. 68). Given that the Dioskouroi were both the model for and the divine protectors of the dual kingship, and that some sort of representation of them accompanied the kings on campaign (Hdt. 5.75), one can imagine that the *dokana* served as a summarizing symbol for Spartan conceptions of kingship.

There is, however, another candidate for a ‘key symbol’ that more comprehensively and universally summarizes the entire Spartan ethos, and which served to render their world-view believable and their ethos justifiable. Plutarch claims that the statues of all Spartan gods and goddesses were armed (*Customs of the Spartans* 28 = *Mor.* 239a and *Sayings of the Spartans*, Charillos 5 = *Mor.* 232d). That is certainly an exaggeration, and armed statues of gods could be found in other Greek cities (such as of Athena Parthenos and Athena Promachos on the Athenian acropolis). But it is an exaggeration based on the fact that an unusually high number of cult statues in Sparta, including many of the most famous ones, depicted deities holding weapons. I have set

out the detailed evidence for armed statues elsewhere (Flower 2009), but I will summarize it here with some important additional arguments.

Apollo has already been described. Athena, Artemis, Dionysos, Herakles, and Aphrodite also were armed. The cult statue of Athena Chalkioikos ('Athena of the Bronze House'), the protecting goddess of the city of Sparta, showed Athena with spear and shield, and was a famous work in bronze of the late sixth century BC. An archaic cult statue of Athena Promachos ('Athena who fights in front'), with an Amazonomachy depicted on her shield, stood somewhere nearby, a few fragments of which survive (Palagia 1993).

Artemis Orthia is depicted on the reverse of a silver coin (a tetradrachm) of King Kleomenes III, struck between 227 and 222 BC (Grunauer–von Hoerschelmann 1978, 12–15, 113–14). The goddess brandishes a spear overhead in her right hand and holds a bow in her left hand. The cultural distinctiveness of Spartan society is brought out sharply when one considers that the two cult statues of Artemis Orthia at independent Messene (both the original marble statue of the late fourth or early third century BC and the mid-second century BC marble statue by Damophon) apparently depicted her without either bow or spear (Themelis 1994). Once removed from the martial context of Spartan culture, the goddess was given a torch instead of a spear.

This ensemble of armed statues is noteworthy because of the numbers involved, even if it is not surprising that any of these particular deities might carry weapons. Some gods, however, were not shown with martial attributes elsewhere, or at least not commonly. Dionysos was represented at Sparta holding a bow (as noted by Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 1.19.1–2). Less surprisingly, in the sanctuary of Herakles his cult statue was armed, even if Pausanias (3.15.3) felt the need to explain why (perhaps he had a spear and shield instead of the traditional club and bow). In contrast to his usual representation in Greek art, one archaic Laconian vase shows Herakles in full armour and on another he is depicted with a hoplite's shield and spear (see Pipili, 1987, 1–3, 13, figs. 1–2).

Finally, Aphrodite was represented equipped with helmet, spear, and shield. This statue, like those of Athena and Apollo, probably dated from the archaic period. In his description of Sparta Pausanias (3.15.10) mentions an 'ancient temple with a wooden statue of Aphrodite armed'. Was this temple so ancient that another one had been erected above it? For Pausanias adds, 'This is the only temple I know that has an upper storey built upon it. It is a sanctuary of Morpho, another name of Aphrodite.' There was also a temple of Aphrodite Areia (of War), and Pausanias remarks (3.17.5) on the antiquity of the cult statue: it too may have been armed.

Although armed statues of Aphrodite could be found on the island of Kythera (for long Spartan-controlled) and at Corinth, nonetheless, the type is extremely rare (Flemberg 1991; Pironti 2007, 231–7, 262–8; Budin 2010).

Other Greeks found the armed Aphrodite at Sparta both strange and peculiarly Spartan. And this may partly have been because the famous statue of armed Aphrodite at Corinth was not an image brandishing weapons or even wearing a helmet. Rather, being half-nude, the Corinthian Aphrodite held up a shield with both hands and in this shield she gazed at her reflection (the so-called Aphrodite of Capua type, which probably dates to the late fourth century BC: Kousser 2008, 19–28).

Sparta's Aphrodite, in contrast to Corinth's, was fully armed for battle. In his essay *The Fortune of the Romans* (4), Plutarch comments, 'The Spartans say that Aphrodite, as she crossed the Eurotas, put aside her mirrors and ornaments and magic girdle, and took a spear and shield, adorning herself for Lykourgos.' And Antipater of Sidon, a poet of the second century BC, expresses both the strangeness of an armed Aphrodite and her iconographic appropriateness for Sparta (Appendix Planudea of the *Palatine Anthology* poem 176):

Cypris [= Aphrodite] belongs to Sparta too, but her statue is not, as in other cities, draped in soft folds. Rather, on her head she wears a helmet instead of a veil, and she holds a spear instead of golden branches. For it is not fitting that she should be without weapons, being the wife of Thracian Ares and a Lakedaimonian.

What did the armed statue of a deity symbolize for the Spartans? Surely it represented Spartan notions of piety, martial courage, and orderliness. Plutarch says as much in the two passages cited above in which he comments on this Spartan tradition. In his *Customs of the Spartans* (*Mor.* 239a), he writes, 'They worship Aphrodite in full armour, and they make statues of all the gods, male and female, holding spears, on the grounds that they all possess the excellence that pertains to war (*polemikē aretē*).' A similar idea is attributed more fully to the Spartan Charillos (an eighth-century BC king) in his *Sayings of the Spartans* (*Mor.* 232d):

When someone asked why all of the statues of the gods that are set up among them have weapons, he said 'So that we may not ascribe to the gods the reproaches that are spoken against men because of their [men's] cowardice, and so that the young may not pray to the gods while they [the young men] are unarmed.'

If these rationales represent Plutarch's own guesses, they are good ones. The whole Spartan system of values and way of life, in effect their entire ethos, is summarized in the image of the armed god.

One could attempt to diminish the significance of this feature of Spartan religion by pointing to parallels in other cities, such as Athens or Corinth, or to Near Eastern prototypes; but here as elsewhere, it is the aggregate that is significant. It is the combination of distinctive features, rather than any one

anomaly, that sets Sparta apart from other Greek cities. In any case, it does not really make a difference where or when the Spartans derived the idea of the armed statue – it is their retention and replication of this iconography that is significant. As has been well pointed out, ‘The origin of cultural practices is largely irrelevant to the experience of tradition; authenticity is always defined in the present’ (Handler and Linnekin 1984, 286).

16.5 Festivals and the Performance of Ritual

In all Greek *poleis* festivals represented the most spectacular form of religious experience and served to forge a shared identity that united the members of the community. Festivals are highly emotional collective experiences, states of ‘collective effervescence’, to use Emile Durkheim’s famous phrase, which overcome the divisions among individuals and subgroups. In Sparta the social function of festivals must have been especially important in both articulating and reinforcing the communal and collective ethos. In addition to the festivals that included the entire community, the rites of passage that took place at the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia, as well as at other sanctuaries in Laconia, served as a highly effective means of socialization for all young Spartiates, both male and female. Although religious rituals and rites had important social functions in all Greek cities, their power was intensified in the geographically isolated and socially conformist world of the Spartan citizen.

Yet it is very difficult to talk about what happened at any of their festivals, even the best attested one, given the nature and date of the evidence. Our access to Spartan ritual performances is filtered through fragmentary written texts. An additional problem for us, who cannot become participant-observers of Spartan festivals and cultic performances, is that a large proportion of ritual activity is non-verbal. So even if we had the complete texts of the hymns and poems that were sung by Spartan choirs, we would still lack an essential component of their performance context: the music and dance that accompanied the words.

In any case, what the Spartans did at a festival (that is, what ritual acts they performed) is a different question from why they did it in that particular way or what it ‘meant’ to them. In general, it is easier to talk about the various social functions of festivals than about their meaning. This is because in most cases there is not a close relationship between ritual and belief, and the participants in any given ritual may believe many different things about what that particular ritual means (Bell 1992, 182–96). Ritual action, in other words, is autonomous. In very general terms it would be safe to say that Spartan rituals performed the sorts of functions that such rites generally do: they served to foster community identity and cohesiveness; they guided and reinforced forms of normative behaviour; they ensured right relations with

supernatural forces; they formed rites of passage; and they facilitated the transmission of the culture's most deeply held values from one generation to the next (Bowie 2006, 138–73). There are two aspects of rituals, however, that need to be stressed because they are so often overlooked. First of all, they are psychologically and emotionally satisfying by promoting confidence, joy, and the alleviation of suffering; in other words, the Spartans actually enjoyed their festivals. And second, rituals, even as they claim to be ancient and traditional, are by no means static; rather, ritual serves as a forum in which social change is enacted, comprehended, and accepted (Kowalzig 2007, 32–43).

The rituals connected with the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia give us our clearest example of change over time. There is sufficient evidence, both material and literary, that the rites and ceremonies that took place in the sacred precinct underwent fundamental transformations. During the sixth century and at least part of the fifth, some sort of ritual performance was enacted in which (presumably) adolescent Spartans wore masks made of perishable materials (perhaps wicker and linen). The original wearable masks are long gone, but the fragments (and some complete examples) of some 603 terracotta masks, surely made for dedication by the participants or their families, have been discovered in the excavation of the sanctuary. The vast majority of these terracotta masks represent two distinct types: deeply furrowed grotesque faces and idealized male faces that are usually but not always bearded. We do not know what type of ritual performance utilized these masks (see Carter 1987 and 1988 for speculation), but apart from a few isolated examples (especially from Samos), they are unique in the Greek world.

By the time of Xenophon, writing in the early to mid fourth century BC, the masks had disappeared from the archaeological record, and the altar of the goddess was the site of a cheese-stealing ritual (*Lak. Pol.* 2.9): Lykourgos 'made it a fine thing [for Spartan boys aged 7–18] to seize as many cheeses as possible from Orthia, but he appointed others to whip them'. At some point in the late Hellenistic period the ritual described by Xenophon was in turn replaced by an endurance test of boys undergoing lashes at the altar of the goddess, even to the point of death (Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 2.6; Plut. *Lyk.* 18.1; Paus. 3.16.10–11). During the third century AD a theatre was erected for spectators. In effect, by the end of the first century BC a fertility or initiation rite of the classical period had morphed into a brutal endurance test and public spectacle that was staged at least partly for the benefit of tourists in a grossly anachronistic version of Lykourgan customs.

Yet despite the huge gaps in the evidence and even allowing for the proclivity of ritual to undergo transformations over time, there are some basic points that we can make with confidence. Spartan festivals were distinctive in that they focused almost exclusively on choral performance, or rather, on the competition between choruses. And in all likelihood this entailed actual, and

mandatory, participation by a significant portion of the male and female citizen body of all ages (Parker 1989, 149 and Hodkinson 2000, 212). Even King Agesilaos, when he was fifty-two years old and the most powerful man in the Greek world, took the place that the choir master assigned to him when he joined in singing the paean to Apollo during the Hyakinthia of 392 BC (Xen. *Ages.* 2.17). It was appropriate, therefore, that when discussing the Spartan penchant for music, Athenaeus cites (633a) the early-fifth-century poet Pratinas for the statement that ‘a Spartan is a cicada ready for a chorus’. And Pindar too, without too much hyperbole, could describe Sparta as the place ‘where the councils of elders and the spears of young men are the best, along with choruses, and the Muse, and Splendour’ (Plut. *Lyk.* 21.3). There was also, it seems, much less of an emphasis on public sacrifice and on the distribution of free meat (Plut. *Lyk.* 19.8 and Plato, *Alkib.* 2.149a). And without doubt, no performance of a tragedy or comedy, at least of the type found in classical Athens (and in other cities too by the end of the fifth century), was ever witnessed in this community during the classical period. The first stone theatre in Sparta was not built until the time of Augustus.

The three most important Spartan festivals, the Karneia, Hyakinthia, and Gymnopaidiai, were all in honour of the youthful god Apollo. The Karneia seems to have been celebrated in all Dorian cities, whereas the Hyakinthia may have been limited to Amyklai (just to the southwest of Sparta) where Hyakinthos’ body was interred. The Gymnopaidiai, as we shall see, played an essential role in defining Spartan identity.

The Karneia was celebrated in honour of Apollo Karneios (‘Ram Apollo’). It famously featured a musical contest, in which the poet Terpanndros won the first victory in 676–672 BC (Athen. 635e–f, citing the fifth-century BC historian Hellanicus of Lesbos). Unfortunately, it is doubtful that the evidence for what happened in later times or in other places has much relevance to what took place in Sparta during the archaic and classical periods. The lexicon of Hesychius (fifth century AD) has entries for *Karneatai*, unmarried young men chosen by lot for four years to organize the festival, and for *staphylodromoi* or ‘grape-cluster runners’. The latter, who were a subset of the *Karneatai*, pursued another runner wearing sacrificial ribbons, it being a good omen for the city if they caught him and a bad omen if they failed (*Anecdota Graeca*, Bekker vol. i. p. 305). But our earliest description is given by Demetrios of Skepsis (second century BC), who is quoted by Athenaeus (late second century AD) in his *Deipnosophistai* (‘Scholars at Dinner’); so we are still several levels removed from what Spartan participants actually did during this festival in the pre-Hellenistic period. Athenaeus writes (131d–f):

Demetrios of Skepsis, in Book I of *The Trojan Battle-Order*, says that the Karneia festival of the Spartans is an imitation of their military training. For there are a total of nine places, and these places are called ‘canopies’ because they contain something that resembles tents. Nine men eat dinner

at each of these canopies; everything is done in response to a herald's order; each canopy contains three phratries; and the festival of the Karneia lasts for nine days.

Not a few scholars have used this passage as evidence for what had taken place during the Karneia centuries earlier (when the Spartan army was still brigaded on the basis of the three original Dorian tribes: and thus the multiples of three). But interpretation should not rest on the mistaken assumption that 'ritual by definition does not change' (Robertson 2002, 51). As stated earlier, rituals are not static, and rather than trying to explain what the festival originally meant (if it ever meant any particular thing at all), one should consider its function(s) and range of possible meanings at the time of our contemporary evidence (the Hellenistic period in the case of Demetrios of Skepsis). It is methodologically suspect to read that evidence backwards in order to construct an original function or meaning or even an original sequence of ritual actions for earlier historical periods.

With the Hyakinthia we are in a much better position because the evidence is earlier and more detailed. Athenaeus (139c–f = *FGrHist* 588 F 1) is here quoting Didymos (first century BC), who in turn is quoting a certain Polykrates (perhaps third or second century BC). Even though the description comes to us third-hand and is Hellenistic in date, it is nonetheless the fullest single account that we have of a Spartan festival.

the grammarian ... says the following things: 'Polykrates relates in his *History of Sparta* that the Spartans celebrate the festival of the Hyakinthia for three days, and because of the grief felt for Hyakinthos they neither wear garlands at their dinners nor serve wheat bread; but they offer sacrificial cakes and the foods that go with them. And they do not sing the paean to the god, nor do they do anything else of the sort that they do at their other festivals. On the contrary, they eat in a very orderly fashion and then depart. But on the middle day of the three there is an elaborate spectacle and a festival assembly that is large and noteworthy. Boys play the cithara with their tunics pulled up high and they sing accompanied by the flute, and running their picks over all of the strings they sing to the god in anapaestic rhythm and in a high pitch. Other boys ride through the theatre mounted on finely adorned horses. Numerous choruses of young men enter and sing some of their local poems, and dancers, who are mixed in with them, move in the ancient style, accompanied by the flute and the song. Some of the maidens (*parthenoi*) are conveyed in expensively decorated wicker carriages, while other maidens parade in a contest of yoked chariots, and the whole city is full of movement and of delight in the spectacle. They also sacrifice very many animals on this day, and the citizens entertain at dinner all their acquaintances [that is, non-Spartan guests] and their own slaves. None misses the festival; on the contrary, it so happens that the city is emptied to see the show.'

Once again, we cannot be sure how much of this description, which dates from the Hellenistic period, is relevant to the archaic and classical periods. Some of the general themes perhaps persisted over several centuries: renewal (mourning for Hyakinthos followed by feasting); initiation (of the young into the community, perhaps following a period of separation); role reversal (with the citizens entertaining their slaves). But there was one very important feature of this festival that Polykrates does not include – the fact that the paean to Apollo was sung by a chorus of men (Xen. *Hell.* 4.5.11; *Ages.* 2.17). Is this a case of omission, or might the function of the Hyakinthia have evolved over time from a festival in which the whole community participated (male and female Spartiates of all ages) to one centred on the young?

One particular detail of Polykrates' description, however, can be documented for the fourth century BC. The wicker carriages (called *kannathra*) that conveyed the young women to the festival are also mentioned by Xenophon (*Ages.* 8.7; cf. Plut. *Ages.* 19.5). They were decorated in the form of griffins and goat-stags, but King Agesilaos ensured that his own daughter's carriage was of a plain type (she apparently rode in a public carriage belonging to the community). The clear implication is that in the classical period, if not earlier, some members of the Spartan elite were employing these sumptuously carved and decorated carriages as conspicuous markers of high social status and wealth.

The Gymnopaïdai (the festival of 'naked dancing') deserves special scrutiny because of the central importance that it played in the construction of Spartiate identity. Lasting as it did for some five days from dawn till dusk and comprising an almost continuous competition between choirs, this festival surely qualifies as a 'performance of great magnitude' (Schechner 1988, xiii and 251–88); that is, a performance that transcended the more temporally limited performances of drama and dance in other Greek cities. One feature in particular is so anomalous that modern scholars have denied its existence despite the explicit testimony of our sources. Choruses of old men competed against choirs of boys and of men in their prime in a cultic context, something which did not happen anywhere else in the Greek world.

The Gymnopaïdai was also a performance of unusual significance in the sense that it articulated an explicit set of beliefs that defined what it meant to be a Spartiate. This festival was an extremely important one to the Spartans – so important that Pausanias (3.11.9) can say of it that 'if there is any festival that the Lakedaimonians take seriously, it is the Gymnopaïdai'. With reluctance, as we have seen, the Spartans delayed the Gymnopaïdai in a belated attempt to stop a democratic coup d'état at Argos. And when during the last day of the festival a messenger arrived bringing the news of the catastrophic defeat at Leuktra in 371, the ephors decided to let the chorus of men continue its competition (Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.16; cf. Plut. *Ages.* 29). What did this festival mean to the Spartans that its proper performance trumped all

other considerations to a degree that would be impossible to document in any other city in reference to any other festival?

Leaving aside the vexed question concerning the battle that it originally commemorated (whether the defeat at Hysiai in 669 or the victory in the Battle of Champions at Thyrea in c.547 – both against Argives), I will focus instead on its social function. Other Greeks, such as Plato, saw the *Gymnopaidiai* as a sort of public endurance test; he has the Spartan interlocutor in his *Laws* (633c) claim that ‘in the *Gymnopaidiai* we display incredible endurance, contending as we do with the full heat of the summer’. But even if ‘endurance’ was either a prerequisite or a consequence of dancing in the full heat of summer, it was not the explicit rationale (Ducat 2006, 273–4). For that we need to turn to Plutarch, who here at least appears to be drawing on evidence that reaches back to the archaic and classical periods. Plutarch reveals how the Spartans themselves viewed the purpose and meaning of this festival, since he quotes some lines that the choruses actually sang. Three choruses, one each of old men, men in their prime, and boys, sang words that served as a sort of script for the conduct of one’s entire life as a citizen hoplite (Plut. *Lyk.* 21, repeated at *Mor.* 238a–b and 544e:).

In their festivals three choruses were formed corresponding to the three age categories. The chorus of the old men sang first, ‘We were once valiant young men.’ Then the chorus of men in their prime would respond, ‘We are now valiant young men; if you wish, put us to the test.’ Then the third chorus, the one of the boys, would say, ‘But we shall be stronger by far.’

Although Plutarch is speaking generally about what happened at Spartan festivals, his description is confirmed by what we otherwise know of the *Gymnopaidiai*. The crucial piece of evidence comes from Athenaeus (678b = *FGrHist* 595 F 5) in a section of the *Deipnosophistai* where he is discussing different types of wreaths. This passage is particularly important because Athenaeus is taking his information from Sosibios, who was the first Spartan to write in detail about the customs of his own people, even if he did so quite late in Sparta’s history (probably mid-third century BC: see Boring 1979, 50–8):

Thureatikoi: Certain wreaths are given this name by the Lakedaimonians, as Sosibios says in his work *On Sacrifices*, and he claims that they are now called *psilinoi* [wreaths of feathers], although they are made of palm leaves. They are worn, he says, as a memorial of the victory at Thyrea by the leaders of the choruses that perform during that festival at the time when they celebrate the *Gymnopaidiai*. The choruses are these: the one of boys in front, <the one of old men on the right>, and the one of men on the left. They dance naked and sing songs by Thaletas and Alkman and the paeans of Dionysodotos the Laconian.

Unfortunately, there seems to be a lacuna in this quotation and editors have added the words that I have placed in broken brackets referring to a third chorus, ‘the one of old men on the right.’ That this emendation is indeed correct is supported by another fragment of Sosibios, F 8 (cited by Zenobius) from a work called *On Customs*: ‘Sosibios records that this is what the old men used to say while dancing: “We were once”.’ It is surely not a coincidence that this is the very same phrase that Plutarch assigns to the old men in the passage quoted above (*Lyk.* 21). We may be confident that Plutarch and Sosibios are both referring to the same choral performance by three different age groups that took place during the *Gymnopaidiai* (Ducat 2006, 269–70).

What is particularly striking about the three verses quoted by Plutarch is the emphasis on collective competition. Whereas in other Greek states individual choruses might compete against each other for a prize, here we have members of each age group representing the entire male citizen body – men in their prime challenging their elders, and the boys in turn, who represent the rising generation of Spartan citizen-warriors, boasting that one day they will surpass their parents and grandparents. If there is any ambiguity, any polyvalence in these lines, it would have been lost on the Spartans themselves. Moreover, the archaic poetic repertoire (dating to the seventh century BC) that Sosibios claims was performed by these choruses was highly appropriate to the themes of the *Gymnopaidiai*. The songs of Thaletas were said to be ‘exhortations to obedience and harmony’ (Plut. *Lyk.* 4.2), while Alkman wrote a poem about those most emblematic of Spartan heroes, Kastor and Polydeukes (frs. 2 and 7 Campbell 1988). As the twin sons of Zeus, they served as ideal role models for young males, being renowned for their excellence in athletic, equestrian, and martial pursuits.

Given the emphasis on Apollo in the three most important festivals, it is not very surprising that Dionysos did not have much of a presence in Sparta (Parker 1988 and Constantinidou 1998). The god did have a shrine in Sparta where associations of young women, called *Leukippides* and *Dionysiades*, sacrificed and where eleven of the *Dionysiades* ran races, but there was no festival in his honour that emphasized the drinking of wine (Paus. 3.13.7). As Plato has the Spartan Megillos firmly assert in his *Laws* (637a–b), in Sparta there were no drunken festivals of Dionysos of the sort to be found in Athens or even in Sparta’s own colony of Taras (Tarentum) in South Italy. This claim is confirmed by Plato’s uncle Kritias, who pointed out in his elegy on Sparta that ‘no day is set aside to intoxicate the body through drinking without measure’ (fr. 6, lines 26–7 Gerber = Athen. 432d). It is not simply the case that the *Anthesteria*, with its heavy drinking, was arguably the most popular of all Athenian festivals – the significant point, and the one that makes Spartan religious practice categorically different from Athenian practice, is that the Spartans had no equivalent festival at all.

Apart from the big three, there were, to be sure, many other festivals that were celebrated each year at fixed times and for various purposes. A famous inscription of the late fifth or early fourth century BC lists the numerous athletic victories of one Damonon and his son in nine different festivals throughout Laconia and Messenia. Two of those festivals were in Sparta itself, one of Athena and another of Poseidon the Earth-Holder (*IG* v.1.213; Hodkinson 2000, 303–7).

Two other festivals held in Sparta may have been of some importance in articulating Spartiate identity. Sosibios says of the otherwise unattested Promacheia, ‘In this festival the boys from the countryside [i.e. boys who were *perioikoi*] are crowned with wreaths of reeds or with a tiara, but the boys from the *agōgē* [i.e., who are participating in the system of education for Spartan youths] follow without wreaths’ (Sosibios *FGrH* 595 F 4, cited at Athenaeus 674a–b). And Polybios, while recording the events of 220 BC, writes (4.35.2; cf. 4.22.8): ‘At a certain ancestral sacrifice the citizens of military age had to march in procession with their weapons to the temple of Athena of the Bronze House, while the ephors remained in the sanctuary to complete the sacrificial rites.’ Either or both of these two rituals, of course, could have been inventions of King Kleomenes III (227–222 BC) as part of his attempt to establish his version of the traditional Spartan military way of life and training (indeed one hallmark of invented traditions is the label ‘ancestral’). However that may be, it is evident even from our limited evidence that the Spartan festival and sacrificial calendar was a full one.

16.6 Women and Religion

The women of Sparta were famous for their personal freedoms in comparison to Greek women elsewhere. It is surprising, therefore, that there apparently were no major festivals in Sparta that were restricted to women, such as the Thesmophoria and Haloa in honour of Demeter or the Adonia. Demeter was certainly worshipped by the Spartans, but the Eleusinion, which is situated some seven kilometres (or about an hour and a half’s walk) to the south-west of Sparta, does not seem to have been an important sanctuary before the fourth century BC and the earliest inscriptions date from the third (Parker 1988, 101). Spartan women indeed participated in religious activities, but in ways that were peculiarly appropriate to and adapted for the Spartan ethos. Young Spartan women on the threshold of marriage famously engaged in two competitive activities that were simultaneously educational and religious. These were running in foot races and singing and dancing in choruses.

Although Xenophon says (*Lak. Pol.* 1.4) in a general way that ‘Lykourgos instituted races and tests of strength for females as well as for males’ so that they would produce stronger offspring, specific references suggest that

women's races took place in a cultic context. Foot races seem to have been especially connected to the worship of Dionysos and Helen. As mentioned above, eleven young women called Dionysiades ran in a competitive race as part of the worship of Dionysos (Paus. 3.13.7 and Hesychius: *Dionysiades*). But since the Dionysiades are first attested in an inscription of about 100 AD (*SEG* 11 (1954) 610, 3), we must turn to earlier sources for more certain evidence of early practices. Theocritus, in his *Marriage Song for Helen*, seems to give the aetiology of a yearly festival in honour of Helen, during which a choir of twelve unmarried young women decorates a plane tree with a wreath, pours a libation of oil under its branches, and then engraves Helen's name on its bark (Hunter 1996, 149–66). In the poem the chorus also refers to the larger group of Helen's coevals, some 240 maidens, running a race on a track along the river Eurotas. But given that Theocritus was writing at Alexandria in Egypt in the early third century BC, the relationship of his narrative to actual (as opposed to imagined) ritual activity at Sparta must be treated with caution.

Singing and dancing in choruses was the other primary activity in the education of Spartan girls and young women, and here our evidence is rather better than for women's footraces. In Euripides' *Helen* (1465–70) the chorus says of Helen that when she returns to Sparta, 'perhaps she will find the daughters of Leukippos by the river or before the temple of Pallas, at long last having joined in the dances or revels for Hyakinthos for nightlong festivity'. In addition to nighttime dancing (which seems to have included married women if we can take this passage of Euripides literally), during the Hyakinthia (as claimed by Polykrates) maidens also took part in competitive racing in chariots, at least by the Hellenistic period. In Athenian festivals, by contrast, there were no competitions, choral or athletic, between women (Parker 2005, 182–3).

The 'maiden song' was an important genre at Sparta, but the only reasonably complete example is Alkman's *Partheneion*, which was probably performed in a ceremony connected with the worship of Artemis Orthia. A chorus of ten young and unmarried women praises the beauty of their chorus leader and of her assistant, as they conduct a sacred object (probably a robe, but possibly a plough) to the sanctuary of a goddess (almost certainly Orthia), perhaps in competition with another chorus. Unfortunately, the interpretation of nearly every aspect of this poem was controversial among Hellenistic scholars, and it is no less so today (Ferrari 2008 is highly speculative). Nonetheless, it is very likely that the songs of Alkman continued to be performed by choruses of Spartan girls for centuries, and that choral performances took place at various sanctuaries both in Sparta itself and throughout Laconia.

Two such ritual performances, which took place on the borderlands of Laconia, may have constituted a rite of passage that temporarily separated young girls from the community, with reintegration into the community

perhaps taking place at the Hyakinthia (Calame 2001, 142–56, 174–85). Pausanias says (3.10.7; cf. 4.16.9) of the sanctuary of Artemis Karyatis on the border with Arcadia, ‘Here every year the Lakedaimonian maidens hold choruses.’ And we are told that there were also dances of maidens at the sanctuary of Artemis Limnatis at Limnai, which was on the Messenian side of Mount Taygetos (Paus. 4.4.2–3; cf. Callimachus, *Hymn 3 to Artemis* 170–3). It may well have been for performance at one of these liminal sanctuaries of Artemis, in the context of a rite of passage from adolescence to adulthood, that Bacchylides wrote his dithyrambic poem *Idas* (fr. 20 Campbell), a poem about the marriage of Idas, a Messenian hero, to Marpessa, a bride whom he snatched from Apollo and brought home to Sparta. Alternatively, it might have been sung by a chorus of young Spartan males at one of the festivals of Apollo (Fearn 2007, 226–34). In any case, these tantalizing fragments of Alkman and Bacchylides bear witness to a fact that undermines the popular stereotype of Sparta as an uncouth and brutal society: to wit, a rich and sophisticated culture of song and dance (much of it composed by lyric poets of the highest renown) was the single most important component of performance in the Spartan religious system for both males and females (see also Calame, this work, [Chapter 7](#)).

16.7 Gods and Heroes

Quite apart from the anomalous concentration of so many images of armed gods and goddesses, there was something else that was peculiar about the religious spaces of the city: the gods who were worshipped there. In some cases it was merely a matter of emphasis. The primary attention given to Apollo, followed by Athena, Artemis, Poseidon, the Dioskouroi, Helen and Menelaos, obviously reflects the main concerns and cultural proclivities of the Spartan community as well as their local mythology. The Dioskouroi surely appealed to the athletic and military pursuits of young men, and Poseidon was important given the prevalence of earthquakes. But there were also gods not worshipped elsewhere. First and foremost, in Sparta alone did the state’s principal lawgiver (Lykourgos) also become one of its gods. Second, there was the sanctuary of the goddess Orthia, who only later (at an uncertain date) became assimilated to the goddess Artemis as Artemis Orthia. During the classical period Spartans alone worshipped Menelaos and Helen as gods (Hdt. 6.61; Paus. 3.19.9; Isocrates *Helen* 63). So too Hilara and Phoibe, the daughters of the legendary Messenian prince Leukippos, were worshipped as goddesses only at Sparta. They involuntarily became the wives of Kastor and Polydeukes and were known as the Leukippides, as were the Spartan maidens who served as their priestesses. There was also a shrine of their sister Arsinoë (Paus. 3.16.1 and 3.12.8).

Although the evidence is late, at some point in their history the Spartans sacralized and established shrines for a whole range of abstract concepts and bodily passions: these were Fear, Shame, Sleep, Death, Laughter, Eros, and Hunger. Only at Sparta could one find such shrines, and this is a clear example of the development of new religious forms that were tailored to support Sparta's particular social ethos (Richer 1999 and 2007, 248–9). Late sources also tell us that before battle the Spartans sacrificed to the Muses and to Eros (Plut. *Mor.* 221a, 238b, 458e; *Lyk.* 21.4; Athen. 561e).

The Spartan attitude to heroes was even more unusual than was their choice of gods. From a general archaeological standpoint, during the archaic and classical periods Laconia was an area exceptionally rich in hero shrines, to judge from the wide distribution of two types of votive dedications: stone 'hero reliefs' and terracotta painted relief plaques. Both the stone and terracotta votives depict similar scenes: seated male and female figures, either together or separately, usually accompanied by a snake (although a woman seated alone appears only on the plaques). The series of stone 'hero reliefs', which begins around 550 BC and continues into Roman times (some forty examples are extant), has long puzzled scholars. Debate has centred on whether the figures represent ordinary or heroized dead, generic ancestors, heroes of a particular cult, or underworld divinities (Hades and Persephone or Dionysos and Demeter). But when interpreted in conjunction with the terracotta plaques found at Amyklai that were dedicated to Agamemnon and Alexandra (about a thousand) and elsewhere, it is most likely that the stone reliefs are votive offerings to heroes – both to 'mythological' heroes, such as Agamemnon, and to the heroized dead, such as the ephor Chilon (Salapata 1993, 2002 and 2015). We might infer from the prevalence of these generic types that terracotta plaques were mass-produced in substantial quantities for dedication to different heroes at various locations throughout Laconia.

It is true that each Greek city had its own particular local heroes, and Sparta was no exception. So, for example, we find heroic cult for Theseus at Athens, for Hippolytos at Troizen, and for Agamemnon and his consort Alexandra/Kassandra at Sparta (Lykophron, *Alexandra* 1123–5 and Paus. 3.19.6.). Nevertheless, the Spartan penchant for erecting hero shrines to historical persons (even quite recent ones) can only have struck outsiders as an extraordinary extension of the cult that other Greek communities sometimes paid to city founders or victorious athletes, but principally to heroes of the distant past. Thus Pausanias mentions a *hērōon* (hero-shrine) of Kyniska, the sister of King Agesilaos II (3.15.1), a *hērōon* for the mid-sixth-century ephor Chilon (3.16.4), and another *hērōon* for one or more members of Dorieus' ill-fated expedition to Sicily in c.510 BC (3.16.4; the text is corrupt). Pausanias even claims (3.12.9) that there was a shrine (*hieron*) for the two most illustrious fighters at Thermopylai (after King Leonidas), Maron and Alpheios. This is odd because the term *hieron* was normally used for a god's

shrine, not a hero's. But can Pausanias really mean that they were worshipped not as heroes, but as gods? To be sure, he unambiguously claims that the seventh-century athlete Hipposthenes was worshipped as a god. For he says (3.15.7), 'There is a temple (*naos*) of Hipposthenes who won many victories in wrestling. They worship Hipposthenes as a result of an oracle, just as they give honours to Poseidon' (for his cult, see Hodkinson 1999, 165–7). The archaeological and literary evidence taken together indicates that the Spartans were accustomed to make offerings to an exceptionally large number of heroes by typical Greek standards.

One has to be cautious with the literary evidence, however, because by the Imperial period, Sparta had become a popular destination for Greek or Roman tourists. Thus in some places the suspicion may arise that what we see on Pausanias' tour of the city was an invention of the Roman or Hellenistic periods. Pausanias mentions some sixty-four temples, shrines, and sanctuaries, and twenty-one hero-shrines. It is extremely unlikely that all of the temples and monuments that he describes existed at any one point in time in the distant past; rather, his tour reflects some eight hundred years of architectural accumulation, restoration, and innovation. In some instances we can prove as much. The temples of Julius Caesar and of Augustus obviously date from the early Principate (Paus. 13.11.4), while the sanctuaries of Serapis and of Zeus Olympios were both established in the second century AD (Paus. 3.14.5; Cartledge and Spawforth 1989, 131). But in other places we can see continuity. Both Herodotos (6.69) and Pausanias (3.16.6), for instance, mention a *hērōon* of the otherwise unattested hero Astrabakos. So too a shrine (*hieron*) of Agamemnon's herald Talthybios is mentioned by Herodotos (7.134), whereas Pausanias (3.12.7; 7.24.1) refers to his cenotaph or tomb (*mnēma*). Furthermore, the hero-shrine of Chilon is almost certainly confirmed by the fragment of a marble hero relief that undoubtedly was a votive offering to Chilon, since it bears the inscription '[Ch]ilon' (with only the Greek letter *chi* missing). But did the Spartans really honour Kyniska as a heroine at the time of her death, or is this the nostalgic invention of a much later period? Perhaps her status as the first woman to win a crown at Olympia (in the four-horse chariot race in 396 BC, and again in 392) provided a sufficient motive to honour her in this way at the time of her death (Paus. 6.1.6; Pomeroy 2002, 21–4; Palagia 2009).

Another peculiar feature of Spartan religion is that Sparta's kings were given posthumous heroic honours. Xenophon concludes his discussion of the kingship in his *Constitution of the Lakedaimonians* (15.2) by telling us something that he considers to be particularly Spartan: 'As regards the honours that are given to a king who has died, the laws of Lykourgos wish to make it clear that the kings of the Lakedaimonians are honoured not as men but as heroes.' And in his *Hellenika* (3.3.1), he comments that when King Agis died in c.400 BC he 'obtained a funeral that was more august than what

is usual for a man'. Nowhere else in the pre-Hellenistic Greek world could one find a normative equivalent to 'the semi-divinity that hedged the Spartan kings' (Parker 1989, 152 for the phrase and Cartledge 1987, 331–43).

The religious importance of the kings is underscored by the fact that they were thought to rule by divine right, as each was 'the seed of the demigod son of Zeus' (Thuc. 5.16.2). As the poet Tyrtaios reverentially referred to them in his poem *Eunomia*, they were 'divinely honoured kings', and 'Zeus himself, the son of Kronos and husband of fairwreathed Hera, has given this city to the Herakleidai [i.e. the kings who were the descendants of Herakles] with whom we left windy Erineus and came to the wide island of Pelops' (frs. 4 and 2 Campbell 1992 respectively). And according to Spartan tradition, Zeus' son Apollo, speaking through the Pythia at Delphi, had confirmed the dual kingship (Hdt. 6.52).

Aristotle characterized the kings as hereditary military commanders, 'to whom also have been assigned the matters relating to the gods' (*Pol.* 1285a3–10). And as Xenophon similarly observed (*Lak. Pol.* 15.2; cf. 13.11), 'Lykourgos granted to the king to make all of the public sacrifices on behalf of the city, since he was descended from the god [i.e. Zeus], and to lead an army wherever the city sends him out.' Even so these statements are something of an understatement, for the amount of sacral authority vested in the kings was immense by Greek standards. The kings were in charge of sacrificial divination when leading armies out of Sparta (Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 13), and they held priesthoods of Zeus Lakedaimon and Zeus Ouranios (Hdt. 6.56). Moreover, each of them appointed two officials called Pythioi, whose job it was to consult Delphi; the texts of the oracles were then kept in the possession of the kings, although the Pythioi also had knowledge of them (Hdt. 6.57). Both Herodotos and Xenophon, it should be stressed, found this aspect of Spartan culture anomalous. Not only is Sparta the only Greek state that warrants an ethnography in his *Histories* (6.56–60), but Herodotos focuses on the religious prerogatives of the kings and emphasizes (6.58) that one must look to barbarian lands for parallels to the elaborate Spartan royal funeral.

Given the charismatic authority of the kings while alive, it should come as no surprise that the Spartan royal funeral was both a highly symbolic and a highly emotive means of reinforcing social hierarchies and of binding the whole community together. As Herodotos describes it (6.58):

Horsemen carry the news of the king's death throughout the whole of Laconia, while in the city the women go about banging on bronze cauldrons. At this signal, in every house two free persons, a man and a woman, must disfigure themselves in mourning, or else be subject to a heavy fine. The Lakedaimonians use the same custom at the death of their kings as the barbarians of Asia – indeed the majority of barbarians

everywhere employ the same custom upon the death of their kings. That is, when a king of the Lakedaimonians dies, in addition to the Spartiates, a fixed number of the *perioikoi* from every part of Lakedaimon are forced to attend the funeral. When many thousands of people – *perioikoi*, helots, and the Spartiates themselves – have assembled in the same place, men and women together strike their foreheads passionately and ceaselessly weep and wail, declaring that this latest king to die was indeed the best one ever. If a king is killed in war, they make an effigy of him and carry it to the grave on a lavishly-covered bier. For ten days after a funeral they conduct no public business, nor do they elect magistrates, but they continue mourning the whole time.

The compulsory attendance at a king's funeral of thousands of individuals, both male and female, from every status-group (Spartiates, *perioikoi*, and helots) bound them together as if they were all members of the dead king's household, and thus insinuated that all had a vested interest in maintaining the unity and in insuring the perpetuation of the Spartan state (Cartledge 1987, 341). The Spartan dual-kingship, nonetheless, owed its historical durability, passing in both royal houses (the Agiad and Eurypontid) for five and a half centuries, to its combination of charismatic religious authority (rule by divine right and control over divination) with strictly enforced constitutional limits on the political and military power of the monarch (Powell 2010).

The heroization of the kings and of other high achievers, in combination with the deification of the lawgiver Lykourgos, was a highly effective means of legitimizing the entire political and social system. In connection with this, the permeability of the categories of mortal, hero, and god, and the easy slippage between them, is more pronounced at Sparta than in other Greek communities of pre-Hellenistic Greece. Hyakinthos, Menelaos, Lykourgos, and Hipposthenes were all mortals who became gods, or perhaps mortals who straddled the line between gods and heroes, just as Chilon, Kyniska, and Sparta's kings were mortals who became heroes after death. It is indeed ambiguous whether Hyakinthos was a hero, since offerings were made at his tomb inside Apollo's altar, or a god, since his apotheosis was depicted on this very same altar (Paus. 3.19.1–5). The case of Agamemnon and Alexandra is particularly interesting because it highlights just how complicated it can be to put heroes and gods into neat categories. Pausanias refers to the shrine (*hieron*) and cult statue (*agalma*) of Alexandra at Amyklai, but merely to the tomb of Agamemnon (3.19.6). The implication is that he considered her to be a goddess (not a heroine) and Agamemnon to be a hero. Pausanias also mentions (3.26.5) a temple (*naos*) of Alexandra at the Laconian town of Leuktra in north-west Mani.

This permeability perhaps provides a context for understanding one of the most extraordinary developments in Greek religion, the granting of divine honours by the Samians to Lysandros in 404 BC. According to Plutarch (*Lys.*

18), the historian Douris of Samos (*FGrHist* 76 F 71) had said of Lysandros: ‘He was the first Greek to whom the cities raised altars and sacrificed as to a god, the first to whom they sang paeans.’ Plutarch then adds, ‘The Samians voted that their festival of Hera (Heraia) should be called Lysandreia.’ Verification came in 1964 when an inscription was found on Samos which records that an individual was four times victor in the Pankration during the Lysandreia (see Habicht 1970, 3–7, 243–4; and Flower 1988, 131–3). Lysandros must have approved of these honours if there is any truth to the story that he personally crowned the poet Nikeratos of Herakleia when he competed at the Lysandreia (Plut. *Lys.* 18.4). It may not be unconnected to this innovation that both Plato (*Meno* 99d) and Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1145a28) state it was a custom among the Spartans to call someone whom they admired ‘a godlike man,’ a *theios anēr* (Currie 2005, 172–5). It was perhaps knowing this that the Samians assumed that their extraordinary grant would be acceptable to Lysandros; that is, they were aware that Spartans held less rigid views about the boundaries separating the human and the divine than did other Greeks.

16.8 The Myth of the Divine Lawgiver

I have attempted to show that Spartan religion comprised a coherent, interconnected, and mutually reinforcing set of beliefs and practices that formed a system. As such, it was uniquely adapted to Spartan social and political structures, and served to support and legitimate those structures while at the same time inculcating Spartan values and ideals. But why was Spartan religion so successful in generating and maintaining social cohesion for so many centuries?

To be sure, the success of Spartan religion was partly a function of the small size and geographical isolation of the Spartan community, so that it was possible for religious rituals to enforce conformity to a degree that is impractical in nation states. Moreover, although religion was ‘embedded’ in all Greek *poleis*, in Sparta the inseparability of religion from every other aspect of political and social life was at one end of an extreme. At the same time the success of Spartan religion was also connected to the validation and legitimization that religious sanction gave to Sparta’s laws, customs, and institutions. And here the Lykourgos ‘myth’ was pivotal. As early as Herodotos (1.65), who was writing in the third quarter of the fifth century BC, the entirety of Sparta’s political and social organization, her *kosmos*, was ascribed to Lykourgos. Various sources tell us that the Spartans believed that his laws were pre-sanctioned, post-sanctioned, or actually dictated by Apollo speaking through his oracle at Delphi (Hdt. 1.65; Plut. *Lyk.* 5, 29; Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 8.5; Strabo 10.4.19 and Diodorus 7.12.2–4). Nevertheless, in each

scenario the result is the same (Flower 2009). The whole system was ordained by Apollo himself, and Apollo's oracles were themselves sanctioned by Zeus (Aeschylus, *Eumenides* 17–19, 616–18; Homeric *Hymn to Hermes* 532–40).

Xenophon perceived the singular significance of this when he observed (*Lak. Pol.* 8.5) that Lykourgos 'had made it not only unlawful but also unholy not to obey laws that were ordained by the Pythian god'. Lykourgos' authority as a lawgiver, therefore, was greater than Solon's or of any other historical Greek lawgiver. And this authority was underscored by the fact that at some point in Spartan history, and certainly by the time that Herodotos wrote his *Histories*, he was being worshipped as a god with his own shrine (Hdt. 1.65–6; Plut. *Lyk.* 30.4; Strabo 8.5.5). Yet at the same time, the laws of Lykourgos were not a straitjacket that stifled innovation and debate. Since his laws were not written down, there was room for constant negotiation within the parameters of Spartan cultural values and norms.

Although Sparta, as was the case with all Greek cities, had her fair share of internal stress and dissension, it is still remarkable that the Spartans avoided violent internal discord and revolution from the mid-seventh century BC (the traditional modern date for the 'Lykourgan' reform, though see the present work, Volume I, [Chapters 4](#) (Nafissi), and 8 (Van Wees)) until the reigns of the 'revolutionary' kings Agis IV and Kleomenes III in the second half of the third century BC, a period of some 400 years (Flower 1991, 2009). If Sparta's reputation in antiquity for good government was mere window-dressing that covered up internal unrest, then it deceived both Herodotos (1.65.2) and Thucydides (1.18.1), both of whom comment upon Sparta's remarkable *eunomia* ('good order') over a period of centuries. Her famed *eunomia* was not completely a mirage, but was based on a long-term internal social and political cohesion. There were many factors that contributed to this state of affairs, but one stands out as being both overlooked in most modern scholarship (with the notable exception of Parker 1989) and yet, in my view, as being particularly efficacious, especially in the sense of enabling those other factors. Simply put, it was the divine sanction for her entire political and social system, and the integration of mutually reinforcing religious beliefs and rituals, that made Sparta one of the most successful, and arguably *the* most successful (in the sense of avoiding both external defeat and internal strife for the longest stretch of time) *polis* in the Greek world.

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FURTHER READING

The only comprehensive book-length study of Spartan religion is Richer (2012). Three short general treatments offer an overview: Parker 1989 is of seminal importance (as is his 1998 study of reciprocity in Greek religion);

Richer 2007 is highly imaginative and good on the topography of sacred space; Flower 2009 attempts to demonstrate the ways in which Spartan religion was distinctive in the Greek world. Pomeroy (2002, 105–30) gives an overview of women and religion, but tends to combine evidence from different periods. The most recent comprehensive study of Spartan festivals is Pettersson 1992 (and is especially useful for its collection of evidence). On the Hyakinthia, see Richer 2004 and Ducat 2006, 262–5; and on the Gymnopaideiai, Böhle 1929, Wade-Gery 1949, Richer 2005, and Ducat 2006, 265–74. For the Karneia, see Robertson 2002, Ferrari 2008, and Richer 2009 (all of which are highly speculative). Wide 1893 provides a detailed list of all gods and heroes with full citations to ancient sources (in German, and extremely useful for the references alone). On the tradition of lawgivers in ancient Greece, Hölskeskamp 1999 is fundamental. An excellent introduction to the anthropology of religion is Bowie 2006. Tweed 2006 offers a provocative new definition of religion while also deftly summarizing earlier theories.

CHAPTER 17

Kingship: The History, Power, and Prerogatives of the Spartans' 'Divine' Dyarchy

Ellen G. Millender

If, on the other hand, we trace the ancestry of Danae, the daughter of Akrisios, we find that the Dorian chieftains are genuine Egyptians. This is the accepted Greek version of the genealogy of the Spartan royal houses. According to the Persian story, however, Perseus was an Assyrian who became a Greek; his ancestors, therefore, were not Greek. And the forebears of Akrisios were in no way related to Perseus but were Egyptian, just as the Greeks attest. But there is no need to say more on this subject. Others have recounted how Egyptians happened to come to the Peloponnese and what they did to make themselves kings in that part of Greece. I will, therefore, say no more on these matters, but I will make mention of issues upon which others have not touched.

*(Hdt. 6.53.2–55)*¹

With this perhaps surprising revelation concerning the Spartan kings' lineage, Herodotos concludes his detailed treatment of the origins of Sparta's two hereditary royal houses, the Agiads and the Eurypontids (6.51–5) and turns to their prerogatives and burial rites (6.56–60). This lengthy digression on the Spartan kingship, which Herodotos situates in his account of the struggle that the Agiad Kleomenes I (reign c.520–c.490) and the Eurypontid Damaratos (c.515–c.491) waged over Spartan foreign policy (6.50–1, 61–71.1), occupies a unique position in the *Histories*. Indeed, Sparta is the only Greek *polis* that merits ethnographic treatment in the *Histories*. Herodotos' focus on its dyarchy, or double kingship, signals his belief that this institution, in its very foreignness, distanced Sparta from the other Greek *poleis* (Millender 2002; 2009, 3–5; cf. Cartledge 1987, 105; Munson 1993, 43–4).

Herodotos' fascination with this aspect of Spartan society should not be surprising, given the general disappearance of hereditary kingship in the Greek world over the course of the eighth century (cf. Drews 1983; Carlier 1984) and the Spartans' unique retention of not one, but two hereditary royal houses that ostensibly descended from the semi-divine Herakles through his

great-great grandson, Aristodamos. Herodotos recounts this – ostensibly Spartan – version of the dyarchs’ lineage alongside his preferred ‘Greek’ version of their Egyptian origins quoted above (6.52). According to his Lakedaimonian sources, Aristodamos’ wife Argeia produced twin sons, and her desire that both would rule led her to refuse to declare which of the two was the elder. The Spartan authorities responded by seeking guidance from the Delphic oracle, which commanded the Lakedaimonians to proclaim both sons as kings but to accord greater honour to the first-born. After they observed Argeia’s consistent preference for one of the twins, the Spartan authorities deemed this boy, whom they named Eurysthenes, the elder of the two and raised him at public expense. They named the other son Prokles. Through this account of the dyarchy’s origins, the Spartans explained and provided divine sanction for their double kingship and the superior status that Eurysthenes’ descendants, the Agiad dynasty, traditionally enjoyed vis-à-vis the Eurypontid royal house descended from Prokles (6.51–2; cf. Kennell 2010, 94).

17.1 The Sources

Although scholars have posited a number of theories on the origins of this double kingship, the dearth of evidence on pre-archaic-age Sparta precludes any firm conclusions (cf. Thomas 1983; Cartledge 1987, 102–3; 2002, 104–6; cf. Oliva 1971, 23–8). Our earliest literary source on the dyarchy is the mid-seventh-century Spartan poet Tyrtaios’ *Eunomia*, which refers to both the Eurypontid Theopompos (c.700–675) and the dyarchy in general (fr. 4–5 West²). After Tyrtaios we have no literary sources on the dyarchy until the fifth century, which produced much of our extant information on the Spartan kingship, as on so many aspects of ancient Sparta. The richest of these texts is Herodotos’ *Histories*, our only source for much of archaic and early classical Spartan history, which features a number of Spartan royal figures and provides a wealth of detail on the prerogatives of the dyarchs (Millender 2002; 2009, 3–5, 10–15). Most of the disparate information on Sparta included in the *Histories*, in fact, clusters around the figures of the Spartan kings and renders Herodotos’ portrait of Sparta essentially a series of royal biographical sketches. For example, he constructs the bulk of his narrative of Spartan internal history in the late sixth and early fifth centuries around the stories of the birth and rivalry of Kleomenes I and his half-brother Dorieus (5.39–48), the conflict between Kleomenes and Damaratos (6.50–1, 61–71.1), and Kleomenes’ madness and demise (6.74–84). He similarly situates several accounts of Sparta’s external affairs in the context of his extended treatment of Kleomenes I, including Sparta’s conflict with the young Athenian democracy (5.70, 72–6) and early fifth-century war with Argos (6.76–81).

Herodotos, moreover, provides genealogical lists of both royal families in his accounts of the forebears of the Agiad Leonidas I (c.490–480) at 7.204 and of the Eurypontid Leotychidas II (c.491–c.469) at 8.131.2. The exact nature of these lists remains unclear, and scholars continue to debate their identification as king-lists rather than royal pedigrees (cf., esp., Prakken 1940; Henige 1974, 207–13; Cartledge 2002, 341–6).

Herodotos' younger contemporary, the Athenian historian Thucydides, furnishes a good deal of information about a number of fifth-century royal figures and their powers both at home and abroad in his study of the Peloponnesian War. Particularly useful are his extended accounts of the Agiad regent, Pausanias, who ostensibly became a Persian quisling in the 470s (1.94–6, 128.3–135.1); the Eurypontid Archidamos II (c.469–428/7), who played a key role in the early years of the Peloponnesian War (cf. 1.80–85.2; 2.10–12, 18–23, 71–5); and Archidamos' son, Agis II (428/7–400), who, among other things, commanded the Spartan forces that won the Battle of Mantinea in 418 BCE (5.63–74). The Spartan kingship also receives a good deal of attention in a number of fifth-century Athenian tragedies that feature members of Sparta's mythical royal family, particularly Sophokles' *Ajax* and Euripides' *Andromache*, *Trojan Women*, *Helen*, *Orestes*, and *Iphigeneia at Aulis* (cf. Millender 2009, 5–6).

The Spartan kings also figure prominently in a number of fourth-century works, particularly Xenophon's *Agésilaios*, an encomium of the Eurypontid Agesilaos II (400–c.360), and *Hellenika*, another important source on Agesilaos II's reign (cf. Millender 2009, 18–22). In his *Lakedaimoniōn Politeia* Xenophon provides general details about the kings' responsibilities and honours at home and in the field (13.1–7, 10–11; 15). Plato, too, briefly discusses the dyarchy in his *Laws* (691d–692b), and Aristotle repeatedly comments on the kings' powers in his *Politics* (1271a18–26, 39–40; 1285a3–10; 1285b26–8, 1313a26–33).

After Aristotle our next most important source on the kingship is the second-century BCE historian Polybios, whose account of Rome's rise to power includes a discussion of Sparta's constitution (6.45; 46.7–10; 48–50). Polybios' *History* also provides details concerning Nabis (207–192), the Spartans' last king (or tyrant), and was thus likely a source for the Roman historian Livy's (c.59 BCE–17 CE) account of Sparta under Nabis' rule in his own history of Rome.² For our next major source on the dyarchy, we need to jump ahead to Plutarch (c.50–120 CE), who shaped modern conceptions of Sparta more than any other ancient author with his biographies and his collections of Lakonian *apophthegmata* (sayings) and customs (*Mor.* 208b–242d). Most useful for our purposes are his biographies of famous Spartans – Lykourgos, Lysander, Agesilaos II, Agis IV (c.244–241), and Kleomenes III (c.235–222), which provide a great deal of information on the dyarchy. Finally, the second-century CE periegetic writer Pausanias furnishes

numerous references to individual Spartan kings – especially in his accounts of Sparta and Messenia (Books 3–4) – and a history of both royal houses (3.2.1–10.5) that render his guide to Lakonia another key source on the dual kingship.

Thanks to these authors' fascination with the Lakedaimonians' hereditary dyarchy, we possess a relatively abundant amount of evidence on this Spartan institution. Nevertheless, any attempt to reconstruct the Spartan kingship inevitably faces those evidentiary obstacles that bedevil the study of ancient Spartan history in general. With the exception of Tyrtaios, all of the extant sources on the dyarchy are non-Spartan, and the paucity of relevant epigraphic and archaeological evidence likewise forces us to look outside Sparta in order to illuminate this Spartan institution. As Paul Cartledge has aptly concluded, 'the vast majority of our written historical evidence is non-Spartan, most of it fifth-century or later, and almost all of it subject to the systematic distortion of the "Spartan mirage"' (2001a, 56; cf. Cartledge 2001b; Ollier 1933–43; Rawson 1969; Tigerstedt 1965–78).

Fifth-century sources on the Spartan dyarchy, including Herodotos' *Histories*, are particularly problematic, given their reflection of Athenian democratic ideology and tendency to associate Spartan kingship with barbarian regimes, as we shall see below (cf. Millender 2002; 2009, 3–7). Scholars have also critiqued Xenophon as an unquestioning supporter of the Eurypontid king Agesilaos II, who was his patron, mentor, and friend (cf., e.g., Lipka 2002, 16–17; Schepens 2005, esp. 31, 49–50, 62). While it is true that Xenophon often waxes fulsome in his encomium of Agesilaos II (cf. Humble 1997, 23–4, 126, 247–53; forthcoming 2018), a number of studies have shown that Xenophon's corpus offers a far more complex and critical depiction of Agesilaos – and Sparta in general – than scholars have long asserted (cf. Cartledge 1987, 55–73; Tuplin 1993; 1994; Dillery 1995; Humble 1997, 23–5, 126–58; 2004; forthcoming 2018; Millender 2012 and forthcoming 2018). Plutarch's biographies, in turn, suffer through their distance from archaic, classical, and Hellenistic Sparta as well as their dependence on questionable sources, such as the sensationalist third-century historian, Phylarchus (cf. David 1981, 145–8, 162–9; Powell 1999, esp. 401–6). Nevertheless, Plutarch remains one of our richest sources on the dyarchy and thus merits our full – if wary – attention.

17.2 A Brief Overview of the Dyarchy

The Lakedaimonians' unique hereditary dyarchy – a rare example of the survival of kingship in the Greek world along with the Battiads of Cyrene and the Macedonian kings – was a key feature of Sparta's complex constitution from the second quarter of the eighth century, if we follow Cartledge's dating

of the joint reign of the Agiad Archelaos and the Eurypontid Charillos to c.775–760 (1987, 101–3; 2001c, 28; 2002, 103; cf. Jeffery 1976, 114). The Spartans continued to draw their collegiate kings via hereditary succession from the Agiad and Eurypontid households until the late third century (see [Figure 17.1](#); cf. the Agiad and Eurypontid genealogies in Carlier 1984, 316–18; Cartledge 1987, 101). In 227 the Agiad Kleomenes III effectively transformed the Spartan dyarchy into a monarchy when he placed his brother Eukleidas on the Eurypontid throne (Plut. *Kleom.* 11.5; *Comp. Agis and Kleom.* – *Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus* 5.2; Paus. 2.9.1).

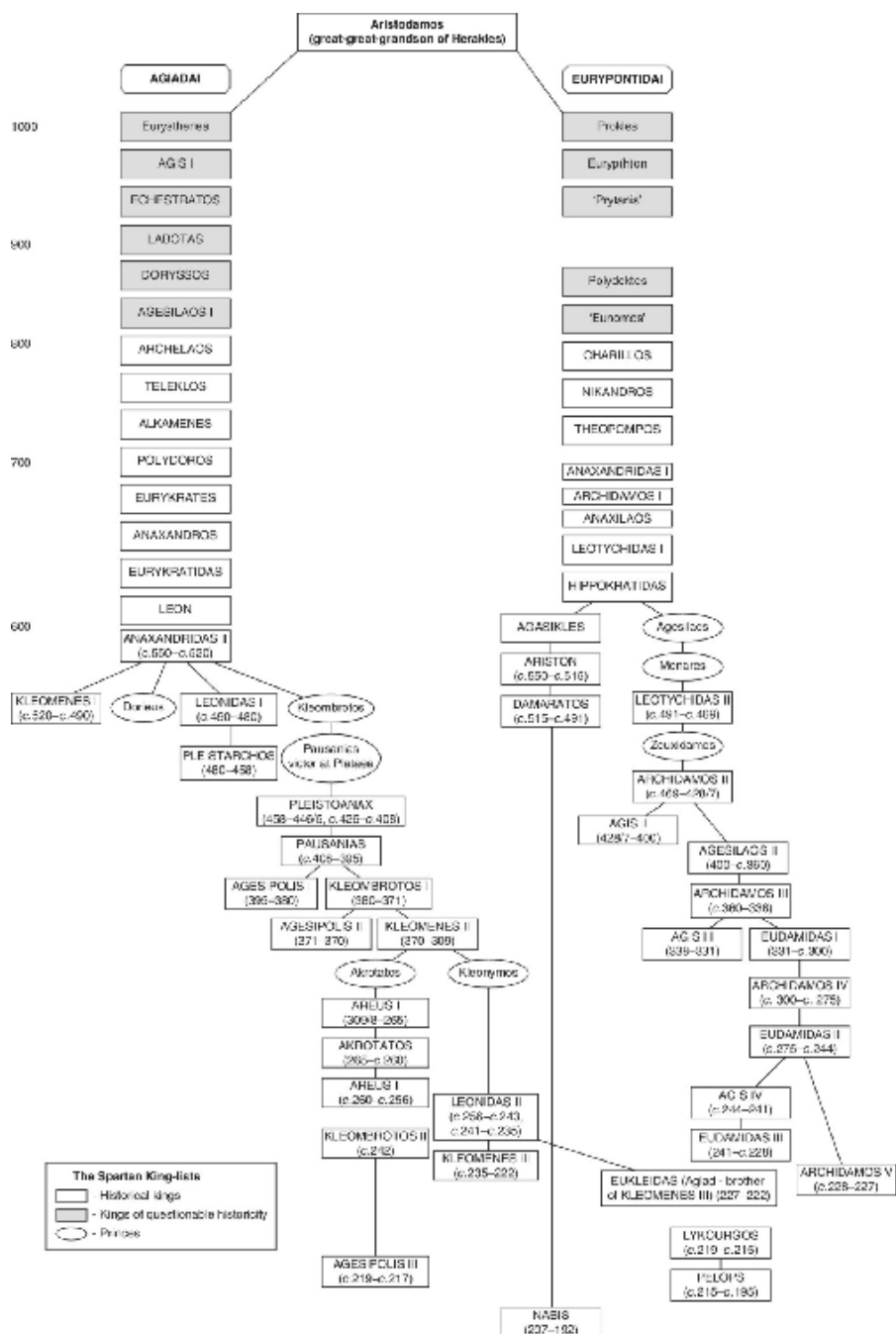


Figure 17.1 The Spartan Dyarchy.

Source: Author.

The Spartan kingship, however, suffered a more serious blow in 222 after the forces of the Macedonian dynast Antigonos Doson defeated Kleomenes III and killed his brother Eukleidas at the battle of Sellasia in northern Lakonia

(Polyb. 2.65–9; Plut. *Kleom.* 28; on the Spartan kingship from 222 to 192, see Cartledge and Spawforth 2002, 57–79). While Antigonos abolished the kingship during his subsequent visit to Sparta (Polyb. 4.35.8; cf. 2.70.1; 5.9.8–9; Plut. *Kleom.* 30.1), Kleomenes III sought refuge in Egypt, where he committed suicide a few years later, in 219 (Polyb. 2.69.11; 5.35–9; Plut. *Kleom.* 29–37; Just. 28.4). Upon learning of Kleomenes' death, the Ephors, the five officials elected yearly by and from the full body of Spartan citizens, restored the kingship and put on the Agiad throne the under-aged Agesipolis, the grandson of Kleombrotos, who had briefly occupied this throne *c.*242. The Eurypontid throne went to a certain Lykourgos, who had no connection to this dynasty but rather bribed his way into office and ruled alone after exiling the young Agesipolis *c.*217 (Polyb. 4.35.8–15, 81.1, 4; 23.6.1; Livy 34.26.13–14). When Lykourgos died *c.*215, he was succeeded by his son, Pelops (cf. Livy 34.32.1). However, a certain Machanidas was Sparta's supreme leader – and possibly tyrant (cf. Polyb. 11.18; Livy 27.29.9; 28.5.5) – from 209 until his death in battle in 207 (cf., esp., Polyb. 10.41.2; 11.10–18; Livy 27.29.9; 28.5.5).

Sparta then came under the control of Nabis, an alleged descendant of the aforementioned Eurypontid Damaratos, who had gone into exile after his deposition *c.*491 BCE. Through a combination of extensive domestic reforms and adept manoeuvring among the major Hellenistic powers, Nabis attempted to restore Sparta's military might and reputation until his assassination in 192 (Livy 35.35; Plut. *Philop.* 15.3). After his death Sparta was forced to join the Achaian League (Livy 35.37.1–3; Plut. *Philop.* 15.4). Although Nabis considered himself a Spartan king (cf. *IG* V.1.885), and others likewise treated him as a monarch (cf. *SIG*³ 584), both the ancient sources and modern scholars rather regard him as a tyrant (cf., e.g., Polyb. 4.81.13; 13.6–7; 16.13.1; Livy 31.25.3; 33.43.6; 34.22.5–41.10; see Mossé 1964; Cartledge 2001a, 59; Cartledge and Spawforth 2002, 68–9).

Before its transformation into a monarchy and then a tyranny in the third and second centuries BCE, the Spartans' double kingship in theory operated via a system of vertical inheritance (passing from father to eldest son). In practice, however, the succession often proved to be far more complicated (Carlier 1984, 240–8; Cartledge 1987, 100). Succession could pass from brother to brother, as in the case of the Agiad Leonidas I's accession to the throne upon the death of his half-brother Kleomenes I. More striking, perhaps, was the succession of the Eurypontid Agesilaos II to the throne of his late half-brother Agis II instead of Agis II's son, Leotychidas, which is discussed in greater detail below (Xen. *Hell.* 3.3.1–4; *Ages.* 1.5; Plut. *Lys.* 22.3–6; *Ages.* 3; Paus. 3.8.7–9.1, 10; cf. Cartledge 1987, 110–15). The throne could also pass from cousin to cousin, for example from the Agiad Leonidas I's son, Pleistarchos (480–458), to Leonidas I's grand-nephew, Pleistoanax (458–446/5, *c.*426–*c.*408). Herodotos provides another variation of the Spartan royal succession

in his account of Kleomenes I's successful attempt c.491 to oust his Eurypontid rival, Damaratos, whom he then replaced with an earlier Leotychidas (= Leotychidas II), a member of a collateral branch of the Eurypontid house (6.61–67.1).

Further complicating the Spartans' system of royal inheritance were the struggles over the Spartan kingship's hereditary succession, which, as Moses Finley has argued, 'belong to the courts of tyrants and barbarian monarchs, not to a Greek *polis*' (Finley 1968, 152; cf. Cartledge 1987, 104; Millender 2002, 13–14). Herodotos' account of the Agiad Kleomenes I's birth and accession (5.39–48) particularly highlights the dangers entailed by the hereditary principle of succession. According to Herodotos, the need to produce an heir and thus to ensure the succession forced the Agiad Anaxandridas II (c.550–c.520) to violate Spartan custom by taking a second wife (5.40.2), an act which inevitably produced strife first between his two wives and later between their offspring – Kleomenes I and his half-brother, Dorieus (5.42).

The dispute over the succession to Agis II's throne in 400 seems to have entailed another bitter struggle. On one side stood the supporters of the dead king's son, Leotychidas, who was reputed to be the product of his mother Timaiia's adulterous liaison with the Athenian Alkibiades. On the other side stood the supporters of Agis II's half-brother Agesilaos, who succeeded to the Eurypontid throne ostensibly through the machinations of his erstwhile lover, the famous Spartan admiral, Lysander (Xen. *Hell.* 3.3.1–4; *Ages.* 1.5; Plut. *Lys.* 22.3–6; *Ages.* 3; Paus. 3.8.7–9.1, 10; cf. Cartledge 1987, 110–15). More than a century later, Kleonymos, the younger son of the Agiad Kleomenes II (370–309), joined King Pyrrhos of Epirus' attempted invasion of Lakonia in 272 in hope of acquiring the throne that his nephew, Areus I, had received in 309/8 upon Kleomenes II's death (Plut. *Pyrrh.* 26.15–19; *Mor.* 219f; Paus. 1.13.5; 3.6.2–3; cf. Oliva 1971, 202–4; Marasco 1980, 31–8; David 1981, 119–31; Cartledge and Spawforth 2002, 29–34).

In addition to these intra-dynastic disputes over the hereditary succession, we know of several inter-dynastic conflicts that likewise exploited the inherent fault lines in the system. An early example is the Agiad Kleomenes I's exploitation of suspicions regarding his Eurypontid enemy Damaratos' paternity to engineer his deposition and to replace him with the more politically amenable Leotychidas II c.491 (Hdt. 6.61–71.1). The Agiad Leonidas II (c.256–c.243, c.241–235) launched an even more aggressive assault on the Eurypontid throne. By forcing the widow of the Eurypontid Agis IV into an illegal marriage with his under-age son, the future Kleomenes III (Plut. *Kleom.* 1.1–2), Leonidas gained control over Agis IV's young son, Eudamidas, and thus extinguished 'Agis' patriline in favour of his own branch of the Agiad house' (Cartledge and Spawforth 2002, 48; cf. Bernini 1977–8). As we have seen, Kleomenes III simply hammered the last nail into the

Eurypontid coffin when he placed his brother Eukleidas on the empty Eurypontid throne in 227 (Plut. *Kleom.* 11.5; *Comp. Agis and Kleom. – Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus* 5.2; Paus. 2.9.1).

While such intra- and inter-dynastic struggles for power demonstrate that the Spartan kingship had a lot to offer to the occupants of the Agiad and Eurypontid thrones, ancient and modern commentators have long debated the extent of the Spartan dyarchs' prerogatives and powers. Did Sparta's kings wield the kind of unfettered power that the Persians' Great King enjoyed? Or was Aristotle more on target with his dismissal of the dyarchy as nothing more than a 'hereditary and perpetual generalship' (*Pol.* 1285b26–8; cf. 1271a39–40; 1285a3–10)? How much credence should we give to Aristotle's suggestion that the kings' influence paled in comparison with the ostensibly 'tyrannical' power wielded by the Ephors (*Pol.* 1270b6–17; cf. 1271a6–7; 1294b29–31; Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 8.3–4; Plut. *Kleom.* 9.7)?

We possess a relative abundance of information on the dyarchy, but this embarrassment of riches provides a complicated picture of the powers and prerogatives that the kings enjoyed both at home and in the field. The extant fifth-century sources on the dyarchy repeatedly suggest that the Spartan kingship differed little from the Greek and non-Greek forms of autocracy featured in Herodotos' *Histories* and rather conformed with the model of absolute rule that the Persian Otanes constructs in his speech in Herodotos' account of the Persians' constitutional debate (3.80.2–5; cf. Millender 2002; 2009, 3–10). Herodotos himself associates Sparta's kings with the Greek and non-Greek autocrats that inhabit his text in his general comments on the Spartan dyarchy and in his individual portraits of Spartan rule. Herodotos, for example, makes explicit comparisons between Spartan and barbarian royal practices, especially in his account of the Spartan kings' funeral honours (6.58–9). Even more striking is his depiction of the Agiad Kleomenes I as the virtual Doppelgänger of the mad Persian despot Kambyses II in his dipsomania, sadism, sacrilege, and violent death (5.39–51, 70, 72; 6.50–1, 61–84; cf. 3.16–38; see Griffiths 1989, 70; Millender 2002, 16–21; 2009, 5). Equally noteworthy is Thucydides' description of the medizing Agiad regent, Pausanias (1.128.3–135.1). In Thucydides' account Pausanias follows the pattern of the would-be despot so closely that one would think he had studied Herodotos' treatment of the foundation of the Median monarchy (1.96–100) and the Persian Otanes' aforementioned discussion of autocracy (3.80.2–5; cf. Lang 1967, 80; Millender 2009, 6–7).

Contemporaneous Athenian tragedies that feature Menelaos, Sparta's mythical king, provide similarly negative treatments of Spartan kingship. For example, Sophokles' *Ajax*, produced in the later 440s, presents Menelaos as a veritable despot whose obsession with his own power leads Teukros, Ajax' brother, to make a vitriolic attack on 'Spartan' tyranny (1047–1162; cf., esp., Stanford 1963, xlv–xlvi, 103, 197–8; Rose 1995, 72–4, 78; Millender 2009,

5). Menelaos later appears as a self-aggrandizing bully in several Euripidean tragedies, particularly the *Andromache* of c.425 (cf., esp., 581–2), the *Orestes* of 408 (1058–9, 1660–5), and the *Iphigeneia at Aulis* of c.405 (303–31). In Euripides' *Andromache*, more significantly, Peleus critiques the rule of Menelaos and Agamemnon (693–705). The chorus provides yet another veiled attack on the Spartan dyarchy in its comparison of the discord that results from two wives sharing the same bed with the strife that arises when two tyrants (473: διπτυχοὶ τυράννιδες) share one rule (471–5; cf. Stevens 1971, 153–4; Poole 1994, 9; Hodkinson 2005, 238; Millender 2009, 6).

It is necessary to take Herodotos' treatment of the Spartan royal houses and Euripides' characterization of the mythical royal family with a grain of salt, given their reflection of an essentially Athenocentric conceptualization of Sparta as a quasi-barbaric 'other' (Millender 2002; 2009, 9–10). Several scholars, in turn, have dismissed Thucydides' odd digression on the Agiad regent Pausanias as an Athenian fabrication, along with the trumped-up charges of medism that helped the Athenians seize and retain hegemony in the Aegean (cf., e.g., Badian 1993, 121–2, 130–2; Fornara 1966, 266). Despite the influence of Athenian democratic ideology on such fifth-century accounts of the Spartan royal families, Herodotos, Thucydides, and a number of other ancient authors furnish information about the dyarchy that counters such ideologically charged representations of Spartan kingship and that offers a very different picture of the Spartan kings' power and prerogatives.

17.3 Collegial and Constitutional Limits on Royal Power

The ancient sources on the Spartan kingship, in fact, provide extensive evidence that illuminates the unique constitutional position of the Lakedaimonian dyarchs, as rulers circumscribed by both their own collegiality and Sparta's other political organs (Millender 2002, 2–3, 11; 2009, 11–13; on the limits of royal power, cf., esp., Carrier 1984, 249–315; Thommen 1996, 85–90). As Herodotos shows in his account of the Agiad Kleomenes I's feud with the Eurypontid Damaratos, the traditionally contentious relationship between the two royal houses (cf. 6.52.8) could limit the authority of individual Spartan kings (cf. Millender 2002, 11; 2009, 11–12). When Kleomenes led a Peloponnesian force to Athens in 506 to avenge himself on the young Athenian democracy and to install Isagoras as tyrant, Damaratos and Sparta's Korinthian allies experienced a change of heart and put an end to the operation. The Spartan Assembly consequently passed a law that only one of the kings could lead a particular campaign outside Sparta at any given time (5.74–6). In 492 Damaratos likewise obstructed Kleomenes' attempt to punish the leading medizers in Aigina (6.50–1, 61.1) and thus sowed the seeds of his

own deposition c.491 (6.61–67.1). Later examples of such ‘uncollegial’ relations between the dyarchs include the Eurypontid Agis II’s vote in 403 for condemnation in the trial of his Agiad colleague Pausanias (c.408–395), grandson of the regent Pausanias (Paus. 3.5.2), and the Agiad Leonidas II’s deadly struggle with his Eurypontid colleague, Agis IV, in the late 240s (Plut. *Agis* 7.8; 10–11; 18.4–20.1).

Royal colleagues, of course, did not always have such antagonistic relations. Xenophon, for example, records the Eurypontid Agesilaos II’s sadness at the death of his Agiad co-king Agesipolis I (395–380) (*Hell.* 5.3.20):

When Agesilaos heard of this, he did not, as one might have expected, exult over it, as over the death of a rival, but wept and missed their companionship. For the kings of course are messmates when they are at home. And Agesipolis was well fitted to converse with Agesilaos about youthful days, hunting, horses, and love affairs. In addition, he showed respect to Agesilaos in their common quarters, as one naturally would to an elder.

Agesilaos II, nevertheless, managed through his superior political skills to dominate not only Agesipolis I but also the series of kings who occupied the Agiad throne after Agesipolis’ death: Kleombrotos I (380–371), Agesipolis II (371–370), and Kleomenes II (370–309) (cf. Cartledge 1987, esp. 139–59, 229–30, 236–313; Smith 1953–4).

The other elements of Sparta’s constitution – the Assembly, the Gerousia, and the Ephorate – enjoyed prerogatives and duties that imposed further limits on the kings’ constitutional, military, and judicial powers (Millender 2002, 2–3, 11; 2009, 11). To begin, the sources suggest that ambassadors from other states were expected to appear before the Spartan Assembly (cf. Thuc. 1.90.5) and routinely addressed it directly on such important matters as the alliance with the Lydian Croesus c.548/7 (Hdt. 1.69.1–2), complaints against Athenian aggression in 432 (Thuc. 1.67.3–79.1), the possible destruction of Athens in 405 (Xen. *Hell.* 2.2.19), and peace with Athens and Thebes in 371 (Xen. *Hell.* 6.3.3–18). In all of these cases, more importantly, the evidence suggests that it was the Spartan Assembly that enjoyed the power, respectively, to make alliances (Hdt. 1.69.3), to declare war (Thuc. 1.87–8), to spare Athens (Xen. *Hell.* 2.2.20), and to conclude peace (Xen. *Hell.* 6.3.18–19). These accounts accord with the description of the Assembly’s powers provided by the ‘Great Rhetra’, the Delphic oracle that ostensibly underpinned the famous Spartan lawgiver Lykourgos’ establishment of Sparta’s constitution (Plut. *Lyk.* 6). This hotly debated political document, which likely dates to the first half of the seventh century and which the Spartan poet Tyrtaios seems to reflect in his *Eunomia* (fr. 4 West² = Plut. *Lyk.* 6.4–5; Diod. 7.12.6), affirms the formal sovereignty of the Assembly (*Lyk.* 6.1).³

At the same time, however, both the ‘Great Rhetra’ and the relevant fragments

of Tyrtaios' *Eunomia* suggest that the Assembly's power was effectively curtailed by the elders in the Gerousia, who, together with the kings, not only presided over meetings of the Assembly but also, more importantly, had the authority to initiate legislation and the power to invalidate the Assembly's decisions (Plut. *Lyk.* 6.1, 3–5, 10; cf. Tyrt. fr. 4 West²; see Cartledge 1987, 124–5; Thommen 1996, 37–8). According to Plutarch, Lykourgos' most important innovation was his institution of this council of twenty-eight elders over the age of sixty (*Lyk.* 5.6–8; 6.1; cf. Hdt. 1.65.5), who usually belonged to the most elite of Spartan families, were chosen by acclamation in the general Assembly of the citizens (Plut. *Lyk.* 26; cf. Arist. *Pol.* 1271a9–11), and served together with the two kings *ex officio* (Hdt. 6.57.5, 63.2; Plut. *Lyk.* 5.6–8; 6.1).

While this aristocratic council of elders likely developed at the same time as the Spartan kingship, Plutarch's biography of Lykourgos suggests that the Gerousia's status vis-à-vis the kings improved in the first half of the seventh century (cf. Cartledge 2001c, 31, 33; Kennell 2010, 48). Plutarch claims that the Gerousia had an equal vote with the kings in matters of the highest importance, provided a moderating influence on the government of the kings, and helped to protect Sparta from the encroachments of tyranny (Plut. *Lyk.* 5.6–7; cf. Pl. *Leg.* 691e–692a). The Gerontes' life-long tenure (Arist. *Pol.* 1270b39; Plut. *Lyk.* 26.1), their freedom from accountability (Arist. *Pol.* 1271a5–8), their control over the preparation and initiation of legislation, and their ability to decline to accept a decision of the Assembly by summarily declaring an adjournment made this body the supreme political organ of the state (Plut. *Lyk.* 26.1; cf. *Ages.* 4.2; on the Gerousia, see, esp., Cartledge 1987, 121–5; Thommen 1996, 37–41; Richer 1998, 344–65). The Gerousia, furthermore, constituted the Spartans' most powerful court, which enjoyed jurisdiction over capital cases (Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 10.2; Arist. *Pol.* 1270b38–40; 1294b31–4; cf. Plut. *Lyk.* 26.1; *Mor.* 217a–b).

We must keep in mind, of course, that the two hereditary kings served on the Gerousia *ex officio* and that they likely had supporters on this council in the form of members of their respective dynasties (cf. Hdt. 6.57.5, along with Cartledge 1987, 122; 2001a, 60). Nevertheless, the ancient evidence makes it clear that the Gerousia could be factionalized and that individual Gerontes were perfectly capable of opposing either or both kings over affairs of state (cf., e.g., Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.25; Paus. 3.5.2; see Cartledge 1987, 133–8). Moreover, as we shall see later, several kings found themselves on trial before the court of the Gerousia, while others, like Agis IV in 243/2, could see their policies derailed by oppositional Gerontes (Plut. *Agis* 11.1).

As the ancient sources suggest, kingly power was further curtailed at some point in the seventh century by the institution of the Ephors (cf. Pl. *Leg.* 692a; Arist. *Pol.* 1313a26–33; Plut. *Lyk.* 7.1–2), officials who later came to wield tremendous executive and administrative powers in Sparta (cf. Arist. *Pol.*

1270b6–17; Plut. *Ages.* 4.2; *Kleom.* 9.7; see Richer 1998, esp. 323–505). Herodotos, for example, makes them responsible for the reception or expulsion of several foreign visitors (3.148.2; 9.7.1–10.1; cf. 3.46.1; 6.106.1) and suggests that the Ephors could make important decisions concerning foreign policy without consulting the other organs of government (9.7.1–10.1). Thucydides' account of the Ephor Sthenelaïdas' prominent role at the debate at Sparta in 432 provides evidence of both the Ephors' presidency of the Assembly and their active role in the crafting and management of Spartan foreign relations (1.85.3–87.3; cf. 5.36–7, 46.4). Xenophon's *Hellenika* further attests to the Ephors' many political responsibilities, including their reception of ambassadors (cf. 2.2.19; 5.2.11), their convening of the Spartan Assembly (2.2.19), and their maintenance of internal security through their successful prevention of Kinadon's attempted revolution in 399 (3.3.4–11).

In his account of the Ephors' meeting with the Athenian envoys in 479, Herodotos also notes their authority – at least in this case – to order out a levy and to appoint its commander (9.10.1). He likely points out another of the Ephors' military responsibilities in his allusive claim that members of the Ephorate were at Plataia with the regent Pausanias in 479 (9.76.3). Since Xenophon makes it clear that in his time two Ephors customarily accompanied the king on campaign (*Lak. Pol.* 13.5; *Hell.* 2.4.36), scholars have generally assumed that the Ephors also performed this function in the early fifth century (cf., e.g., Cartledge 1987, 17, 106, 128; Thommen 1996, 132; Richer 1998, 413). Xenophon, in addition, reveals that the Ephors often were in charge of mobilizing the troops (*Hell.* 3.2.23, 25; 3.5.6; 4.2.9; 5.3.13; 5.4.47; 6.4.17; 6.5.10) and decided the age-limit fixed for all the components of the levy – the cavalry, infantry, and engineers (*Lak. Pol.* 11.2).

In addition to these prerogatives, the Ephors enjoyed extensive judicial powers (cf. Richer 1998, 431–53). According to Xenophon, these officials were created to instill obedience in all Spartan citizens and thus could fine and exact immediate payment from whomever they chose. More importantly, he claims that the Ephors had the authority to deprive Spartan magistrates of office and even to imprison and bring capital charges against them (*Lak. Pol.* 8.3–4; cf. 4.6). Aristotle likewise notes their power to hold officials to account (*Pol.* 1271a6–7). He also observes that the Ephors enjoyed supreme powers of jurisdiction in important cases (*Pol.* 1270b28–31) and later specifies that they tried contract cases (*Pol.* 1275b9–10). Finally, the second-century CE author Pausanias claims that the Ephors served together with the Gerousia on Sparta's supreme criminal court, which enjoyed jurisdiction over cases of homicide, treason, and other serious offenses that carried the penalty of disfranchisement, exile, or death (3.5.2). In comparison, the dyarchs enjoyed sole discretion over few legal matters: the marital arrangements of every unwedded heiress (*patrouchos*) whose father had died before arranging her betrothal, all matters connected with public roads, and all adoptions (Hdt.

The Gerousia and Ephorate not only enjoyed extensive powers that necessarily limited the scope of royal influence but also could exert direct control over the dyarchs in a number of ways (cf. Plut. *Ages.* 4.2; see Richer 1998, 389–430; Cartledge 2001a, 59–60; Millender 2009, 12–13). Herodotos’ account of the circumstances surrounding the birth of Kleomenes I, for example, shows that both of these organs of government could intervene in the kings’ domestic affairs when matters of interest to the Spartiate commonwealth were concerned (5.39.2, 40.1, 41.2; cf. 5.42.2). When King Anaxandridas II’s first wife failed to produce an heir and put in jeopardy the hereditary succession of the Agiad dynasty, it was the Ephors who suggested that the king divorce his wife. Upon his refusal, the Ephors and the Gerontes strongly advised Anaxandridas to take a second wife and threatened that his disobedience would force the Spartans to take unpleasant measures against him (5.40.1). The nature of the threat is unclear, but the above evidence suggests that Anaxandridas might have had to face prosecution if he continued to follow a policy contrary to the good of the community.

The kings certainly had to take such ‘advice’ seriously, given the Ephorate’s power to call the dyarchs – like all other Spartan authorities (ἄρχοντες) – to account (Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 8.3–4). Xenophon, more importantly, reveals that every month (presumably at the time of the regular monthly meeting of the Assembly) the kings and the Ephors (on behalf of the *polis*) exchanged oaths by which each king swore to reign in accordance with established laws, and the Ephors swore to keep the kingship ‘unshaken’ (ἀστυφέλικτον) if each king abided by his oath (*Lak. Pol.* 15.7; on this contract between the *polis* and the kings, cf. Carlier 1984, 252 n. 87, 276). In his biography of Agis IV, Plutarch adds that every eight years the Ephors watched the skies on a moonless night. If they observed shooting stars, it was up to them to decide if either of the kings had transgressed in his dealings with the gods. The Ephors then had the power to depose the offending king unless an oracle from Delphi or Olympia indicated otherwise (*Agis* 11.4–5). By means of this prerogative, the Ephor Lysander c.243 brought about Leonidas II’s deposition on the grounds that the Agiad king had had two children by an Asian woman and had sought to settle abroad (Plut. *Agis* 11; cf. 3.9; 10.4). Lysander then wangled the transference of the Agiad throne to Leonidas’ son-in-law, Kleombrotos (Plut. *Agis* 11.7–9). Plutarch’s later account of Agis IV’s brutal murder further suggests that the Ephors who engineered this Eurypontid king’s downfall had the power to arrest, imprison, try, condemn, and execute a king (*Agis* 19–21). It is thus not surprising that Leonidas II’s politically ambitious son, Kleomenes III, ordered the murder of the Ephors and abolished this magistracy in 227 (Plut. *Kleom.* 3.1–2; 5.2; 7.3–6; 8; 10.1–10).

Plutarch’s biographies of Agis IV and Kleomenes III recount a particularly turbulent period in Spartan political history, and we should beware of

assuming that earlier Ephors possessed this degree of power. Nevertheless, several fifth-century sources clearly demonstrate that the Ephors and Gerontes enjoyed a great deal of leverage in their relations with the kings. Thucydides, for example, recounts the Spartan Ephors' surveillance and eventual arrest of the Agiad regent, Pausanias, in the 470s (1.131.2–134; cf. 1.95.3, 182.3). Herodotos notes the Ephors' power to summon kings to appear before them (5.39.2) and records three occasions on which Spartan kings were brought before the supreme court of the Ephorate and Gerousia on criminal charges. Kleomenes I's enemies brought him into court on a charge of bribery following his victory over Argos at the battle of Sepeia c.494, but the court found the king's pleas credible and acquitted him (6.82).⁴ Although Herodotos claims that Kleomenes' closest relations (προσῆκοντες) later placed the mad king in the stocks, where he mutilated himself to death (6.75.2), the other evidence on the Ephors' powers to arrest the kings suggests that they were responsible for his imprisonment. Kleomenes' Eurypontid ally, Leotychidas II, appeared before the court twice, the first time for violence committed against the Aiginetans (6.85), the second time on a charge of bribery during his campaign in Thessaly c.476 (6.72). In both cases the court found Leotychidas guilty, handed him over to the Aiginetans on the first occasion, and banished him on the second. These episodes demonstrate that the kings could be tried before the high court and then deposed, if they were found guilty of the proffered charges (cf. Parke 1945; de Ste. Croix 1972, 133–4, 350–3; David 1985).

Few kings experienced the violent ends met by Kleomenes I (Hdt. 6.75) and Agis IV (Plut. *Agis* 19–21), but the reigns of the Agiad and Eurypontid kings during the fifth century show that the dyarchs could and did receive a variety of punishments at the hands of their fellow Spartiates (on the instability of the kingship during this period, see Powell 2010). To those kings discussed above we must add the Agiad Pleistoanax, whose decision to curtail the Peloponnesians' invasion of Attike in 446 earned him exile on the charge that the Athenians had bribed him to withdraw (Thuc. 2.21.1; 5.16; cf. 1.114.2; Plut. *Per.* 22–23.1; *FGrH* 70 F193). Pleistoanax's son, Pausanias, likewise went into exile in Tegea after being sentenced to death in 395 for retiring without battle from Haliartos following Lysander's defeat (Xen. *Hell.* 3.5.25; Diod. 14.89.1; Paus. 3.5.5–7; cf. Paus. 3.5.2). Pausanias' experience may explain his composition of a tendentious political pamphlet that advocated the abolition of the Ephorate on the grounds that it was a post-Lykourgan accretion (cf. Ephorus *FGrH* 70 F 118 (= Strabo 8.5.5 [C366]); Arist. *Pol.* 1301b17–21).⁵

While the Eurypontid dynasty generally fared better during this period, it had its own share of problems during the Peloponnesian War (431–404). In his account of the debate at Sparta in 432, Thucydides describes the Eurypontid Archidamos II's failure to persuade the Spartiates against war and his political

defeat at the hands of the otherwise unknown Spartan Ephor, Sthenelaïdas (1.80–7). The Peloponnesian troops later criticized Archidamos' sluggish invasion of Attike (Thuc. 2.18.2–5), but this king's unpopularity pales in comparison to the anger that his son Agis II incurred upon his unilateral conclusion of a four-month truce with Argos in 418 (Thuc. 5.60.1–2). Agis' failure to crush the Argives in battle, together with the enemy's capture of Orchomenos, led the enraged Spartans to threaten to pull down his house and to fine him 10,000 drachmai (Thuc. 5.63.2). In the end the Spartans stipulated the election of ten citizens to act as advisers (σύμβουλοι) to Agis. Without their authority the king was not empowered to lead an army out of the city (Thuc. 5.63.4), and Diodorus suggests that these same advisors later accompanied Agis II's successor and half-brother, Agesilaos II, on a campaign against Thebes (15.33.1).⁶

In his account of the Agiad Kleombrotos I's command of the Lakedaimonian forces at Leuktra in 371, Xenophon further demonstrates the dangers that could arise for the king who incurred the Spartiates' anger. When Kleombrotos' friends advised him to join battle with the Thebans, they made it clear that any other decision would invite exile or something worse (*Hell.* 6.4.5):

‘Kleombrotos, if you let the Thebans escape without a battle, you will be in danger of suffering the most extreme penalty at the hands of the *polis*. For they will remember against you not only the time when you reached Kynoskephalai and laid waste no part of the country of the Thebans, but also the time when, on your later campaign, you were beaten back from effecting your entrance, although Agesilaos always made his entrance by way of Kithairon. Therefore if you really have a care for yourself or a desire to see your fatherland again, you must lead against these men.’

Kleombrotos, as it turns out, was ‘damned if he did and damned if he didn’t’. Inaction would have meant punishment at home, while his decision to engage the Thebans led to both their destruction of the Spartan forces at Leuktra and his own death. In any event, Kleombrotos' accountability to his *polis*, like that of the other dyarchs described above, confirms the exiled king Damaratos' eulogy of Spartan freedom in his dialogue with Xerxes in Herodotos' *Histories* (Hdt. 7.103–4): Lakedaimon's dyarchs did not exercise the same domination over the Spartiates as the Persian kings exercised over their subjects (cf. Millender 2009, 15; cf. Cartledge 2001a, 58).

17.4 Dynamic Dyarchs: Kleomenes I and Agesilaos II

While the dyarchy was constitutionally limited and individual kings could be

imprisoned, exiled, deposed, and even murdered, a number of ancient sources make it clear that Sparta's kings were not necessarily ineffectual or under the thumb of the other organs of government. A careful reading of Herodotos' *Histories* reveals that the Agiad Kleomenes I was an energetic and capable ruler who dominated Spartan foreign policy in the late sixth and early fifth centuries and seems to have pursued a consistent anti-Persian agenda, as manifested in his interventions in Athens (5.70–6, 90), Aigina (6.49–50, 61.1, 64, 73), and Argos (6.76–82; cf., esp., Carlier 1977, 70–84; Cawkwell 1993; Thommen 1996, 87–90, 92–6; Cartledge 2001a, 64–5; Millender 2002, 11–12; 2009, 13–14). Perhaps more significantly, Kleomenes overshadowed and then helped to depose Damaratos, his Eurypontid colleague who proved to be an obstacle to such policies (6.51.1, 61–73). Herodotos, of course, could not hide the fact that Kleomenes was held accountable by his fellow citizens (6.74–5, 82). Nevertheless, Kleomenes appears in the *Histories* as the principal, if not the only, representative of Spartan diplomacy and as the sole Spartan negotiator with the Samian tyrant Maiandrios c.516 (3.148), the Milesian tyrant Aristagoras in 499 (5.49–51), and the representatives from Scythia (6.84). We also learn that Kleomenes was the prime mover behind the Spartans' intervention in Athens at the end of the sixth century and in control of certain expeditions from their inception (5.70, 72, 74). Herodotos' narrative of Kleomenes' conduct of the war against Argos c.494 likewise suggests that the Agiad king alone was responsible for the choice of route, the conduct of the campaign, and the final decision to spare the city of Argos (6.76–82). Kleomenes' attempt to punish the leading medizers in Aigina (6.50, 61.1) shows the same personal initiative and assertion of royal authority (6.49–50, 61.1, 64, 73).

For another example of a 'kingly' king, we turn to the famous fourth-century Eurypontid Agesilaos II (cf. Cartledge 1987, the definitive study of this king's reign). As the ancient evidence demonstrates, Agesilaos was a constitutionally limited king who faced challenges on a number of fronts. For example, Xenophon claims that when Agesilaos was recalled from his expedition against Persia in the early spring of 394, the king put the request of the home authorities above his desire to crown his achievements with the destruction of Persia (*Ages.* 1.36, 2.16; cf. *Xen. Hell.* 4.2.2–3; *Diod.* 14.83.1–3; 15.31.3; *Plut. Ages.* 15.2–5). While Xenophon perhaps exaggerates Agesilaos' obedience to his fatherland (*Ages.* 6.4) and patriotism (*Ages.* 7.2–3), other extant sources on Agesilaos similarly suggest that this powerful king respected the power wielded by other state officials and obeyed the laws of the land (cf., esp., *Diod.* 15.31.3; *Plut. Ages.* 1, 4, 15.2–5, 17.1; see Millender 2009, 19–21). Several ancient texts also reveal that Agesilaos had plenty of political opponents throughout his career (cf. *Xen. Ages.* 7.3; *Hell.* 5.4.25; *Diod.* 15.19.4; *Plut. Ages.* 5; 23.2, 4, 6; 24.3; 25.1; see Smith 1953–4; David 1981, 20–42; Cartledge 1987; Hodkinson 1993, 162–71; 2000, 323–8, 426–33). Among these the most dangerous by far was the ambitious Lysander, who

openly challenged Agesilaos' authority and ostensibly aimed at the kingship that traditionally had been the prerogative of the hereditary Agiad and Eurypontid royal houses at Sparta (Arist. *Pol.* 1301b19–20; cf. 1306b31–3; Diod. 14.13; Nep. *Lys.* 3; Plut. *Ages.* 8.3–4; *Lys.* 24.2–26, 30.3–4; *Mor.* 212c, 229f; see, esp., Bommelaer 1981; Cartledge 1987, 77–98, 151–3, 162–3; Powell 2010, 121–5; Millender forthcoming).

Despite these challenges to and limitations on Agesilaos II's authority, he wielded such tremendous influence both at home and abroad during his long reign from 400 to c.360 that the fourth-century historian Theopompos of Chios and Plutarch deemed him the greatest, most powerful, and most illustrious man of his time (*Ages.* 40.2; cf. 10.5 (= Theopomp. 115 F 321), 36.1; see Cartledge 1987; 2001a, 65–7). Through strategic use of his considerable wealth, his hereditary role as a military leader, and his royal prerogatives, Agesilaos was able to deploy a tremendous degree of personal patronage that allowed him to stifle opposition and to increase the power of the Spartan kingship to its greatest extent since Kleomenes I's reign.

For example, it was Agesilaos' adroit exploitation of the traditional channels of Spartan political patronage that explains his ability to effect the vote of acquittal in the major political trial of Sphodrias in 378 (Cartledge 1987, 136–59; 2001a, 66). While governor of the Boiotian city of Thespiiai, Sphodrias made an unprovoked invasion of Attike with the intention of seizing the Athenians' harbor at Peiraeus although Sparta and Athens were officially at peace, and – most embarrassingly – Spartan ambassadors were actually in Athens at the time (Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.20–23; Plut. *Ages.* 24.3–6). According to Xenophon (*Hell.* 5.4.25), the high court that tried Sphodrias *in absentia* was split into three groups: Agesilaos' supporters; the friends of Agesilaos' royal rival, Kleombrotos I, who were political associates of the self-exiled Sphodrias and presumably desired acquittal; and those in the middle. Although Sphodrias belonged to a rival faction and had grossly violated Agesilaos' own foreign policy agenda concerning Athens and Thebes (cf. Cartledge 1987, 136, 157; 2001a, 66), Agesilaos rather unexpectedly voted in his favour and swung the entire jury to a vote for acquittal (Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.24–33; cf. Plut. *Ages.* 25–26.1). This episode reveals the extent of Agesilaos' personal influence and, more importantly, his masterful manipulation of the sources of political patronage at his disposal. By switching his vote, Agesilaos placed Sphodrias and Kleombrotos I in his debt and thus effectively discouraged their resistance to his foreign policy schemes. In the end, Sphodrias and Kleombrotos I died in battle at Leuktra in 371, 'fighting a war against Thebes that was the outcome and fulfilment of the wishes of Agesilaos above all' (Cartledge 2001a, 66; cf. Cartledge 1987, 137–8, 158–9; Kennell 2010, 101).

The extent of Agesilaos' influence becomes even clearer when we consider the role that he played in Spartan policy-making throughout his reign. As an

active general, Agesilaos naturally had opportunities to shape foreign policy while he was on the field. He was, for example, responsible for negotiating Sparta's relationship with Persia during his campaigns in Asia Minor in the mid-390s (Xen. *Hell.* 3.4.3–4.1.41) and for settling affairs in Phleious in 379 (Xen. *Hell.* 5.3.10–17, 21–5). Agesilaos, moreover, was largely in control of the aggressive foreign policy that Sparta pursued after the ratification of the Peace of Antalkidas (otherwise known as the 'King's Peace') in 386. Xenophon repeatedly notes Agesilaos' exploitation of the Spartans' rapprochement with Persia to establish the Lakedaimonians' dominance over their fellow Hellenes, especially the Thebans whom he personally detested (cf. Cartledge 1987, esp. 194–202, 218–308, 369–81; Tuplin 1993, 87–100; Dillery 1995, 199–221; Millender 2012, 418–21, forthcoming 2018). In his *Agesilaos* he mentions the king's zeal in using the King's Peace to pursue unpopular policies against the Corinthians, Thebans, and Phleisians (2.21–2). His *Hellenika*, more specifically, records Agesilaos' demand that the Thebans swear, in accordance with the Persian king's directions, that every Greek city should be autonomous (*Hell.* 5.1.32–3). We next learn that the Spartan king forced the Corinthians and Argives to dissolve the union of their *poleis* in 386 (*Hell.* 5.1.34). Xenophon reveals his own discomfort with such policies throughout the *Hellenika*, especially in his description of Agesilaos' needless provocation of the Phleisians in 381 (5.3.16; cf. Plut. *Ages.* 24.2).

In the end it was Agesilaos' repeated provocation of the Thebans (Plut. *Ages.* 26.2–3), and particularly his refusal to allow them to swear to the peace treaties of 386 and 371 on behalf of all the Boiotians (Xen. *Hell.* 5.1.32–3; 6.3.19; cf. Plut. *Ages.* 28.1–2), that spelled Sparta's defeat at Leuktra in 371 and subsequent decline into a second-rate power (cf., esp., Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.3–15). During the remaining years of his reign, Agesilaos seems to have continued to guide Spartan foreign policy, which now focused on the unrealizable goal of regaining Messenia (Plut. *Ages.* 34.2; 35.2–4; cf. Xen. *Hell.* 7.1.27, 4.9; Polyb. 4.33.8–9; Diod. 15.89.2).

17.5 The Roots of Royal Power

The evidence on Kleomenes I and Agesilaos II supports Paul Cloché's theory that while the Spartan kingship was constitutionally based, capable and determined dyarchs could successfully extend the purview of their functions without violating the law (1949; cf. de Ste. Croix 1972, 125, 138–48; Thomas 1974; Carlier 1977; Cartledge 1987, esp. 4, 18, 105–10, 205–6). Royal power essentially derived from a king's 'personal skill in exploiting the potentialities of the resources at his disposal, not directly from the kingship's position in the Spartan governmental hierarchy' (Kennell 2010, 103). Enterprising kings managed to enjoy great power by taking full advantage of both these

resources and the important role that personal leadership played in Spartan society (cf. Thomas 1974, 258–9; Millender 2002, 12–13; 2009, 14–15; Kennell 2010, 98–102).

Among the advantages at the dyarchs' disposal, we must include the continuity in office that all dyarchs theoretically enjoyed. In Sparta the majority of offices, including the Ephorate, were annual; and the single exception to this rule, the Gerousia, was open only to elite Spartiates over sixty years of age. The kings, on the other hand, could exercise influence over great spans of time and thereby gain the experience, support, and opportunities to shape, if not control, Spartan foreign and domestic policy. Particularly important in this regard was their membership on the Gerousia *ex officio* from a comparatively young age, which likely enhanced their relative power in this probouleutic council (Cartledge 2001a, 60, 65). It is surely no coincidence that Kleomenes I and Agesilaos II, two of the most powerful kings in Spartan history, enjoyed unusually long reigns.

A number of other factors helped these kings maximize the benefits offered by their tenure of office, including the tremendous wealth (cf. Hdt. 6.62.2) that they enjoyed from their royal estates located in Perioikic territory (Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 15.3) and from the tribute they received from the Perioikoi (Pl. *Alk. I* 123a–b). Herodotos provides another detail about the sources of the kings' wealth in his claim that when a king died, the new king released every Spartiate from the debts he owed either to the king or to the public treasury (6.59). A number of sources suggest that the kings also could have enriched themselves through gifts or war booty. The Agiad regent, Pausanias, for example, was awarded ten of every kind of spoil collected after the battle of Plataia in 479 (Hdt. 9.81.2). According to Xenophon, the Eurypontid king Agis II gave a tithe of the booty he had won after success in battle to Apollo at Delphi in 400 (*Hell.* 3.3.1; cf. 3.2.26), just as his half-brother Agesilaos II later did in 394 (*Hell.* 4.3.21; cf. 3.4.12; *Ages.* 1.16, 4.6; *Plut. Ages.* 19.3). Xenophon and Plutarch shed light on the scale of these royal riches in their discussions of Agesilaos II's inheritance of Agis II's estates. Agesilaos apparently acquired so much wealth that he donated half of these estates to his mother's kinfolk (Xen. *Ages.* 4.5; *Plut. Ages.* 4.3). Plutarch further records Agesilaos' custom of sending an ox and a cloak to newly elected members of the Gerousia, a calculated use of personal resources that could only have given him leverage on this council (*Ages.* 4.3). As Xenophon makes clear, Agesilaos' wealth made it possible for him to exercise the extensive patronage that put a host of Spartans into his debt (*Ages.* 4.4; cf. *Plut. Ages.* 4.4).

The kings' privileges at public sacrifices and regular meals, especially their double rations (Hdt. 6.57.1–4), further allowed them to peddle their influence by inviting guests to dine with them on both occasions. Another opportunity to dispense royal favour came in the kings' right to appoint *proxenoi*, i.e. those Spartans who represented other *poleis*' interests at Sparta (Hdt. 6.57.2).

In other *poleis* this privilege typically belonged to the foreign cities that the *proxenoi* represented. The dyarchs, moreover, chose the Pythioi, the officials responsible for consulting the oracle at Delphi who ate with the kings at public expense (Hdt. 6.57.2). While they were on campaign, the kings also likely enjoyed the authority to choose the three Spartiates who attended the king's mess with the polemarchs and who took charge of the commissariat for the king and his staff (Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 13.1).

Another royal advantage that we need to consider is the kings' hereditary role as Sparta's military leaders (cf., esp., Thomas 1974; Carlier 1977, 77 ff.; Cartledge 1987, 105–6, 205–6; 2001a, 61–2). As we have seen, the Spartan Assembly had the authority to declare war (cf. Thuc. 1.87–8) and peace (cf. Xen. *Hell.* 6.3.18–19). After 506 only one king at a time could command a particular force outside Sparta (Hdt. 5.75.2), and Ephors accompanied the commanding king perhaps as early as 479 (Hdt. 9.76.3; Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.36; *Lak. Pol.* 13.5). In 479 the Lakedaimonians also apparently appointed the Elean seer Tisamenos to lead their wars together with their Heraklid kings (Hdt. 9.33.3; cf. Powell 2010, 93–4, 101–2, 113), and in 418 they mandated the election of those advisors who were to authorize Agis II's campaigns (Thuc. 5.63.4; cf. Diod. 15.33.1). Finally, the king on his return home could find himself forced to defend his military strategy and performance before the high court of the Gerousia and Ephorate (cf., e.g., Hdt. 6.82). Nevertheless, the kings, while on campaign, enjoyed the power of life and death (Cartledge 1987, 106; 2001a, 61), maintained control over their campaign strategies, made decisions regarding the time and place for encampment (Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 13.10), and dealt in the first instance with anyone who had business to transact with the Spartans while on campaign (Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 13.10).

Dynamic kings also had the opportunity to shape Spartan foreign policy through their campaigns. Kleomenes I exploited his military prerogatives to pursue an anti-Persian agenda (cf. Hdt. 5.70–6, 90; 6.49–50, 61.1, 64, 73, 76–82), and later Agesilaos II repeatedly agitated for and then led campaigns against the Thebans (cf., e.g., Xen. *Hell.* 5.1.33; Plut. *Ages.* 26.2–3). The Agiad Pausanias likewise called for the expedition which he led to Athens in 403 in the hope that his reconciliation of the warring factions in the Peiraieus and the city of Athens would deprive his rival, Lysander, of the opportunity to gain control over Athens (Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.29). While the Spartans in 403 sent out fifteen citizens to help Pausanias settle affairs in Athens, Xenophon makes it clear that these men were to work in concert with Pausanias, not to oversee his activity (*Hell.* 2.4.38; cf. Thomas 1974, 269–70).

As Carol Thomas (1974) has argued, the dyarchs' military prerogatives assume added importance when we consider the Spartans' particular military demands and the grounding of their foreign policy in military preparedness and strength. Two overriding military requirements largely dictated Spartan policy – control over the Helot population and a strong position vis-à-vis the

other members of the Peloponnesian League. Accordingly, those kings who were able and willing to meet Sparta's particular security and foreign policy needs through successful military direction were able to parlay their achievements in the field into influence over almost every aspect of state policy. Strong military leaders such as Kleomenes I and Agesilaos II indeed found that the 'prescriptive right to the supreme command of citizen and allied armies in a militarized state like Sparta was potentially a passport to undying fame abroad and enormous political influence at home' (Cartledge 1987, 205–6). Less successful dyarchs, such as the Agiad Pleistoanax and his son Pausanias, learned that military failures and poor policy choices led, instead, to unpopularity, condemnation, and exile.

The hereditary dyarchs, moreover, enjoyed a preponderance of religious authority in Sparta both on and off the field, as Aristotle notes in his *Politics* (1285a6–7; cf. Carlier 1984, 256–69; Cartledge 2001a, 63–4; Parker 1989, 143, 152–60; Richer 2007, 239–41; Powell 2010, 127; Millender forthcoming). Herodotos provides a detailed list of the religious prerogatives that the Spartans granted to their kings, beginning with their hereditary priesthoods of Zeus Lakedaimonios and Zeus Ouranios, the only priesthoods known to have existed in Sparta in the classical period (6.56.1). In addition, he notes their unlimited rights of sacrifice while on campaign, their right to all the skins and (while on campaign) backs of sacrificed animals, their receipt twice monthly of full-grown victims to offer to Apollo, and their right at public sacrifices to sit down and be served first, to receive double portions, and to make the first libations (6.56–57.2). Last but not least, Herodotos claims that the kings alone enjoyed the right to appoint the two Pythioi and to maintain custody of all oracles (6.57.2, 4; cf. Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 15.5; Plut. *Mor.* 1116f.; Cic. *Div.* 1.43.95; cf. Millender 2001, 129). This final religious prerogative should not be underestimated, given the prominent role that divination played in Spartan decision-making on important political matters (Powell 2010 and Flower, this Volume, [Chapter 16](#)).

Xenophon provides further evidence on the kings' religious obligations, particularly their conduct of sacrifices (cf., e.g., *Ages.* 1.31; *Hell.* 4.3.12–14; 5.4.37, 41, 47, 49; 6.5.12, 17, 18; *Lak. Pol.* 13.2–5, 15.2–3). In his description of the dyarchs' powers on campaign in his *Lakedaimoniōn Politeia*, Xenophon notes the kings' need to offer sacrifice twice at the commencement of all campaigns – first, to Zeus Agetor ('the Leader') before the army left home and, later, to Zeus and Athena once the army reached the frontier. Only when both sacrifices proved acceptable to the gods did the king cross the border, taking with him those animals he would offer at future sacrifices (*Lak. Pol.* 13.2–3). Anton Powell (2010, 93–4, 97–8, 101–2, 113) has noted that the Spartans seem to have limited the kings' divinatory prerogatives twice, through the appointment of the seer Tisamenos to conduct military operations in 479 (Hdt. 9.33.3) and through the presence of two Ephors at all sacrifices

offered during campaigns (Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 13.5). Xenophon, however, insists upon the kings' control over the conduct of sacrifices (*Lak. Pol.* 13.2–5) and claims that the kings were to act as priests in matters relating to the gods while on active service (*Lak. Pol.* 13.11). More significantly, he states that kings enjoyed the authority to offer all the public sacrifices on behalf of the city, a prerogative which derived from their divine descent (*Lak. Pol.* 15.2).

As Xenophon here demonstrates, the kings possessed an exceptional status in relation to their fellow citizens both in life and in death that led Max Weber to describe the dyarchy as an example of 'family-charismatic' kingship (Weber 1978, 1285; cf. Cartledge 1987, 24, 95, 104–10, 128, 336–40; 2001a, 58, 62–4; Parker 1989, 152–3; Millender forthcoming). The key element of the dyarchs' unique position was their reputed lineal descent from the semi-divine Herakles – and hence from Zeus, which set the kings above their fellow Spartiates and mortal men in general (cf., esp., Hdt. 6.52.1; 7.204, 208.1, 220.4; 8.131.2; 9.33.3; Thuc. 5.16.2; Xen. *Ages.* 1.2; *Hell.* 3.3.3; *Lak. Pol.* 15.2). The Agiads' and Eurypontids' claims to a Heraklid lineage can be traced back at least as far as Tyrtaios (fr. 2.12–15 West²) in the middle of the seventh century and may have been forged simultaneously with the Spartan dyarchy itself in the second quarter of the eighth century (Cartledge 2002, 343; cf. 1987, 338–9). The Agiads and Eurypontids, of course, were not the only descendants of Herakles in Sparta (cf. Tyrt. fr. 2, 11 West²; Pind. *Pyth.* 1.62–5; Hdt. 8.114.2). Lysander himself was a Heraklid through his father, Aristokleitos (Plut. *Lys.* 2.1), and ostensibly aimed to open the kingship to all fellow Spartiates who claimed descent from Herakles (Plut. *Lys.* 24.2–5). Plutarch, however, asserts that the Agiads and Eurypontids were the only Heraklid families that participated in the royal succession, while the rest enjoyed no special political privileges as a consequence of their high birth (*Lys.* 24.3; cf. 2.1).

The royal dynasties, however, could boast not only of their divine connections to Herakles and thus Zeus but also of their links to Menelaos, the Homeric king of Lakedaimon, his semi-divine wife Helen, and Helen's brothers, the Dioskouroi, who reputedly lived underground at the Menelaion, the famous sanctuary of Menelaos and Helen located to the east of Sparta (Alkm. fr. 7 Campbell). When the kings went on campaign, they took with them as talismans images of the Dioskouroi (Hdt. 5.75.2), who functioned as 'the model and divine guarantee of the Spartan dyarchy' (Carlier 1977, 76 n. 42; cf. Cartledge 1987, 109, 339; 2001a, 62–3; Richer 2007, 239–40). As I have argued elsewhere, the Eurypontid Agesilaos II may have tried to emphasize his family's connection with the semi-divine Helen and, by extension, the first 'royal family' of Sparta, through the hero-shrine that was erected for his sister Kyniska close to the sanctuary of Helen at some point in the first half of the fourth century (Paus. 3.15.1; cf. Millender 2009, 24–5; forthcoming; see my [Chapter 19](#) on Spartan women in this volume).

The royal dynasties further maintained their lock on preeminence through the king-lists that Herodotos used in his reconstruction of late archaic and early classical Spartan history (7.204; 8.131.2). As Cartledge has argued, these lists ‘affirmed the determinate, vertical system of succession to high office and specified the limits of eligibility’ and thus provided ‘a genealogical “charter” of their right to rule’ (1987, 102; cf. Cartledge 2002, 343–4). The Agiads’ and Eurypontids’ claims to primacy received further support via the divine sanction awarded to the kings – designated as ἀρχαγέται (‘founder leaders’) – in the seventh-century ‘Great Rhetra’ (Plut. *Lyk.* 6). Tyrtaios’ roughly contemporary poem, *Eunomia*, likewise situates the kings at the head of Sparta’s divinely ordained regime: ‘Counsel is to begin with the divinely honoured kings,/who have the lovely city of Sparta in their care’ (fr. 4 West² = Plut. *Lyk.* 6.5; Diod. 7.12.6). Herodotos, in turn, records the Spartans’ belief that the Heraklid kingship – in the person of Aristodamos – was coterminous with Sparta’s foundation and that the Delphic oracle sanctioned the establishment of his sons, Eurysthenes and Prokles, as dyarchs (6.52; cf. Arist. *Pol.* 1310b38–9). Thucydides provides another link between the kings and the *polis*’ origins in his discussion of the exiled Pleistoanax’ contested restoration to the Agiad throne c.426. According to this account, Pleistoanax’ bribery of the Delphic oracle induced the Lakedaimonians ‘to restore him with the same dances and sacrifices with which they had instituted their kings when they first settled Lakedaimon’ (5.16.3). Taken together, these sources suggest that the dyarchs received heroic honours as Sparta’s divinely descended and sanctioned ‘founder-leaders’ (Cartledge 1987, 103, 111, 338; cf. Powell 2010, 125).

The dyarchs’ supra-mortal status made them the natural arbiters of the Spartans’ relations with their gods (cf. Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 15.2). Indeed, the close connection between the dyarchs and the twin Dioskouroi, who (in representational form) accompanied them on their expeditions (Hdt. 5.75.2), both emphasizes the semi-divine nature of the Spartan kingship and suggests that the kings functioned as guarantors of the divine protection of Sparta (cf. Carlier 1977, 76 n. 42; Cartledge 1987, 338; 2001a, 62–3; Millender 2009, 14). Similarly, the dyarchs’ hereditary priesthoods of Zeus Lakedaimonios and Zeus Ouranios (Hdt. 6.56.1), together with their responsibility for conducting necessary sacrifices before setting out on expeditions, indicate their symbolic role as guardians of the state’s continued welfare (cf., esp., Cartledge 1987, 105).

Even more indicative of the Spartans’ belief in the kings’ responsibility for their *polis*’ well-being are the stories that circulated around the accession, deposition, and death of certain dyarchs. While Leonidas I’s death in 480 was thought to ensure Sparta’s survival (Hdt. 7.220.2–4), the unjustified restoration of Pleistoanax to the Agiad throne c.426 apparently boded ill for the entire community (Thuc. 5.16; cf. Powell 2010, 106–9, 125). Equally

telling is the succession dispute between Agesilaos II and Agis II's son, Leotychidas, in 400 that hinged on an oracle that warned of the dangers that a lame kingship posed to Sparta. While the diviner (*chrēsmologos*) Diopeithes used this oracle to argue against the accession of the lame Agesilaos, Lysander successfully championed Agesilaos' cause by arguing that Leotychidas' illegitimacy more clearly threatened to cripple the Spartan kingship (Xen. *Hell.* 3.3.1–4; Plut. *Lys.* 22.3–6; *Ages.* 3–4.1; *Comp. Ages. – Pomp.* 2.1; Paus. 3.8.7–9.1, 10; cf. Cartledge 1987, 110–15). The identification of the dyarchs and the common weal, however, appears most clearly in the symbolic death that the *polis* experienced through the suspension of all commercial and political activity during a prescribed ten-day period of mourning following the king's funeral (Hdt. 6.58.3; cf. Millender 2002, 10–11).

The dyarchs' supra-mortal status and role as *polis* guardians help to account for the symbolic importance the Lakedaimonians attached to the bodies of their kings (cf. Cartledge 1987, 109, 333–7; Millender forthcoming). No Spartan could lay hands on a king, not even the Ephors, who had the right to arrest and imprison the dyarchs (cf. Plut. *Agis* 19.9; 21). In battle the Spartans also posted the elite three hundred Hippeis as a bodyguard around the king (cf. Hdt. 7.224.1; Thuc. 5.72.4) and fought to the death to protect the king's body, as Herodotos suggests in his account of the Spartans' struggle over Leonidas I's corpse at Thermopylai in 480 (7.225.1). Pausanias further states that when the Agiad Kleombrotos I fell in battle at Leuktra in 371, 'the Spartans were bound by necessity not to yield, though sorely distressed. For among the Lakedaimonians it was considered the greatest disgrace to allow the corpse of the king to fall into the hands of enemies' (9.13.10; cf. Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.13; Diod. 15.55.5–56.1).

Herodotos claims that whenever a king died in war, the Spartans made an effigy (εἰδωλον) of him that they carried on a bier (6.58.3; cf. Schaefer 1957; Richer 1994, 70–82; Toher 1999). This custom seems to suggest that a number of royal corpses either were lost in battle or simply received burial abroad. Herodotos, however, may rather be referring to a special law passed to deal with Leonidas I's violent end (cf. Schaefer 1957, 224; Cartledge 1987, 333), or the effigies may have operated as important religious symbols in the burials of all kings who died in battle (cf. Toher 1999). The loss of a king's body in battle, in any event, seems to have been limited to Leonidas I and Agesilaos II's son, Archidamos III (c.360–338) (Theopomp. *FGrH* 115 F 232 = Athen. 12.536d; cf. Toher 1999, 114 n. 4).

Indeed, the Spartans took great pains to ensure the return of royal corpses to Sparta for proper burial, despite their custom of burying all other Spartans who died abroad on the spot (cf. Plut. *Ages.* 40.3). The Agiad Agesipolis I, who died in 380 of a fever while campaigning in distant Pallene, was accordingly embalmed in honey and returned to Sparta, where he received a

royal burial (Xen. *Hell.* 5.3.19). Agesilaos II's corpse, however, seems to have returned to Sparta encased in melted wax, because of a shortage of honey (Nep. *Ages.* 8.7; Plut. *Ages.* 40.3; cf. Diod. 15.93.6). Leonidas I, for some reason, initially received burial at Thermopylai; but forty years later his bones were restored to Sparta, where the fallen king received a proper tomb, and annual games were instituted in his honour (Paus. 3.14.1; *IG* V.1.660; cf. Connor 1979; Richer 1994, 73–7). The Spartans' decision to repatriate his remains signals their respect for both the power that resided in the king's physical remains and the daimonic power of the kingship itself (cf. Boedeker 1993, 168; Richer 1994, 70–82). Through their possession of this force, the kings continued to protect Sparta in death as they had in life by means of their family tombs, which were situated to the south (Eurypontids: Paus. 3.12.8) and northwest (Agiads: Paus. 3.14.2) of Sparta (Richer 1994, 89–90; 2007, 250, cf. 244).

The dyarchs' semi-divine lineage, finally, helps to explain their exemption from a number of the rituals and regulations that applied to all other Spartiates. Thanks to Plutarch's biography of Agesilaos, scholars have concluded that heirs to the throne alone were not obliged to go through Sparta's comprehensive system of public education (*Ages.* 1; cf. Cartledge 1987, 23–4, 32, 104). The kings, in addition, not only received special treatment when they died abroad but also enjoyed at home an exemption from the modest funeral rites mandated for other Spartiates (cf. Plut. *Lyk.* 27.1–2; *Mor.* 238d), as Herodotos demonstrates in his description of the elaborate royal funeral ceremony (6.58; cf. Cartledge 1987, 331–43; Hartog 1988, 152–6; Toher 1991, 169–73; Millender 2002, 7–11):

The kings have received these prerogatives from the Spartan commonwealth during their lifetime, and when they die they receive the following honours. Horsemen carry news of the death throughout Lakonia, and women go about the city beating cauldrons. When this has been accomplished, two free people from each house, one man and one woman, are compelled to put on mourning or incur heavy penalties if they fail to do so. The Lakedaimonians observe the same custom at the deaths of their kings as the barbarians of Asia, for most of the barbarians observe the same custom upon their kings' deaths. For, whenever a king of the Lakedaimonians dies, not only the Spartiates, but also a certain number of the Perioikoi from all over Lakedaimon, are obligated to attend the funeral. When the Perioikoi, the Helots, and the Spartiates themselves have been assembled in the same place to the number of many thousands, mingled with the women, they zealously strike their foreheads and make endless lamentation, declaring that the most recently deceased king was the best king they had ever had.

While Xenophon provides comparatively little information about Spartan royal funerary rites, he describes Agis II's burial as far more august

(σεμνοτέρας) than that accorded to mere mortals (*Hell.* 3.3.1). Far more important is Xenophon's suggestion that the kings were accorded ongoing heroic cult after death (*Lak. Pol.* 15.8–9; cf., esp., Cartledge 1987, 335–6; 1988; Currie 2005, 244–5; *contra* Parker 1988). The royal burial, in other words, at once continued and reified the heroic status that the Spartan king enjoyed in his lifetime as the semi-divine and divinely sanctioned founder and protector of Sparta (Cartledge 1987, 340; 2001a, 63).

Like all of the other markers of the kings' heroic status and religious authority, the royal obsequies performed the vital political function of preserving the differentiation in rank between the dyarchs and all other Spartiates – that same demarcation which Xenophon notes in his account of the monthly exchange of oaths between the dyarchs and the Ephors (*Lak. Pol.* 15.7; cf. Cartledge 1987, 340; Millender 2002, 7–11; 2009, 4). Herodotos demonstrates that the royal funeral achieved this separation visually through the mourners' elaborate display of fealty (6.58). Through their speechless display, self-mutilation, obligatory attendance, and compulsory externalization of their lamentation, the Lakedaimonian mourners abased themselves and established the absolute superiority of the dead king. By endowing the kings with continuing hero-cult, the royal funeral even further bolstered the political primacy of the dyarchs, who occupied a position right below the gods on the religious-political hierarchy that structured Spartan society and supported the norms of orderliness and obedience on which it was based. The dyarchy was often in sore need of such bolstering, and both royal houses undoubtedly benefited from the talismanic authority that the royal obsequies conferred on even the most unpopular of kings, as Xenophon shows in his account of Agis II's rites in 400 (*Hell.* 3.3.1; cf. Powell 2010, esp. 127–8).

17.6 Spartan Kingship in the Hellenistic Period

As we have seen, certain Spartan kings, such as the Agiad Kleomenes I and the Eurypontid Agesilaos II, through their adept exploitation of such advantages, dominated their royal colleagues and exercised extraordinary control over Spartan foreign policy. Nevertheless, the Spartan dyarchy remained both constitutionally and collegially limited until the Hellenistic period, when the Spartan kingship became adapted to a political culture shaped by Macedonian rule. As early as the reign of the Agiad Areus I (309/8–265), royal rule in Sparta began to assume elements of Hellenistic, autocratic kingship (cf., esp., Marasco 1980; David 1981, 132–8; Cartledge and Spawforth 2002, 28, 33–7; Millender 2009, 32–3). Areus sponsored Sparta's first silver coinage, including tetradrachms modeled on Alexander the Great's issues that bear the legend BASILEOS AREOS ('Of King Areus'; cf.

Head et al. 1911, 434; Kraay 1966, 345 no. 520; Grunauer–von Hoerschelmann 1978, 1–4). Equally noteworthy is the Decree of Chremonides of c.268/7, which records the Athenians’ alliances with Ptolemy II Philadelphos and with the Spartans and their allies, who were already allied to Ptolemy II (*SIG*³ 434/5). Although the inscription mentions other Spartan officials and twice refers to ‘the kings’ (ll. 37, 90–1), Areus is the only Spartan honoured with the specific mention of his name. Ptolemy II’s contemporaneous dedication of a statue to Areus at Olympia similarly recognizes and celebrates Areus’ virtual monarchy (*SIG*³ 433; cf. Oliva 1971, fig. 54):

King Ptolemy son of King Ptolemy:

Areus, son of Akrotatos, king of the Lakedaimonians,

because of good will towards him and towards all the Greeks,

to Zeus Olympios.

The Eleans’ dedication of a statue with eulogistic inscriptions to Areus I in Olympia (Paus. 6.12.5; cf. 6.15.9) further attests to Areus’ preeminent status in Sparta.

Although Plutarch is a source that needs to be handled with care, his accounts of later third-century Spartan kings support the picture of Spartan kingship provided by the epigraphic, numismatic, and literary evidence on Areus (cf. Millender 2009, 33–4). His biography of Agis IV reveals that this Eurypontid king likewise manifested monarchic tendencies in his attempt to push through his reforms in 243. According to Plutarch, Agis IV engineered the deposition of his Agiad opponent, Leonidas II, and replaced the existing board of Ephors with officials who proved more amenable to his agenda (cf., esp., *Agis* 11–12). After his return to power c.241, Leonidas II, in turn, plotted the destruction of Agis IV (Plut. *Agis* 18.4–20.1) and deprived the Eurypontid house of all effective power by manoeuvring his son, the future Kleomenes III, into the guardianship of Agis IV’s infant son, Eudamidas (Plut. *Kleom.* 1.1–2). Kleomenes III’s later destruction of the Ephorate (Plut. *Kleom.* 3.1–2; 5.2; 7.3–6; 8; 10.1–10) and appropriation of the Eurypontid throne in 227 (Plut. *Kleom.* 11.5; *Comp. Agis and Kleom. – Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus* 5.2; Paus. 2.9.1) probably contributed to Polybius’ belief that this Agiad king was a tyrant (2.47.3).⁷

These changes in Sparta’s political culture reflect both the larger socio-political shifts that reshaped the Greek world during the Hellenistic period and the strong links that the Spartan kings – particularly the Agiads – forged with the Macedonian dynasties that succeeded Alexander the Great in Egypt and Asia. The Agiad Areus I, whom Phylarchus accused of imitating the Eastern courts (Athen. 141f–142b = *FGrH* 81 F 44), allied Sparta with Ptolemy II of

Egypt (*SIG*³ 434/5) and possibly encouraged ties with the Seleukids' subjects in Jerusalem (cf. *I Macc.* 12.7, 19–23; Joseph. *AJ* 12.225–8; 13.167; see David 1981, 135–9; Cartledge and Spawforth 2002, 35–7, 239 n. 22). This close connection with the Hellenistic dynasties continued under the later Agiad Kleomenes III, who issued tetradrachms modelled on Seleukid and Ptolemaic usage (cf. Grunauer-von Hoerschelmann 1978, 7–19) and allied Sparta with Ptolemy III Euergetes. Ptolemy III subsidized Kleomenes' efforts against his fellow Macedonian dynast, Antigonos III Doson, from 226/5 down to 222 (Polyb. 2.51.2, 63.1–5; Plut. *Kleom.* 22.4; Cartledge and Spawforth 2002, 54–7) and made a dedication in honour of Kleomenes at Olympia (*IvO* 309). After his defeat by the forces of Antigonos at the battle of Sellasia in 222, Kleomenes sought refuge in Egypt, where he committed suicide in 219 after he lost the favour of Ptolemy III's successor, Ptolemy IV Philopator (Polyb. 2.69.11; 5.35–9; Plut. *Kleom.* 29–37; Just. 28.4).

While Kleomenes III looked to Egypt for support, his father, Leonidas II, formed personal and political ties in Asia, where, according to Plutarch, he was a long-time frequenter of satrapal courts and a servile follower of the Seleukids (*Agis* 3.9; cf. 10.4; 11). It was ostensibly Leonidas' Eastern leanings and interest in importing into Sparta the pride and pomp which informed political relations abroad that made his fellow Spartiates uneasy when he acceded to the Agiad throne c.256 (Plut. *Agis* 3.9). It thus seems fitting that Leonidas II later found himself locked in a struggle for political supremacy with his Eurypontid colleague, Agis IV, whom he accused of seeking absolute rule through his political and social reforms (Plut. *Agis* 7.8). Plutarch supports Leonidas II's reading of his opponent's motivations in his account of Agis IV's successful attempt to persuade his mother, Agesistrata, to support his reforms. According to Plutarch, Agis argued that the honour he would gain through his equal distribution of property among all the citizens would allow him to win the name and fame of a truly great king and to compete with Ptolemy III Euergetes and Seleukos II Kallinikos (*Agis* 7.2–3). As Plutarch makes clear, Agis IV's wealthy female relations ultimately supported his reforms when they, too, realized that such changes could help to strengthen the prestige of Agis' kingship and, by extension, the Eurypontid dynasty (*Agis* 7.4; cf. Millender 2009, 28, 33–5; see my [Chapter 19](#) on Spartan women in this volume).

Agis IV's dreams of glory, of course, died with him in 241, just as Kleomenes III's – albeit more successful – attempt to reinvigorate Sparta came to a bloody end on the field at Sellasia in 222. While these kings tried to restore Sparta's military power and preeminence in Hellas, they failed to halt Sparta's continued slide into political obscurity. At the same time, Agis and Kleomenes accelerated the dyarchy's transformation into an autocracy through their increasingly high-handed appropriation of political power at home and their unrealistic ambition to compete on the larger Hellenistic stage.

It is perhaps not surprising that Sparta's effective political power died alongside the dyarchy that, according to the Spartans, marked the *polis*' very beginnings and symbolically ensured the community's welfare.

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NOTES

- 1 All translations are my own unless noted otherwise.
- 2 Cf., esp., Polyb. 13.6–8; 16.13, 16–17, 36–7; Livy 31.3–10; 34.22.5–41.10; 35.12.2–9, 13.1–3, 25.2–31.1, 35.1–19.
- 3 Cf. Millender 2001, 127–8 n. 25. On a date of c.675–650 for the Rhetra, see, esp., Forrest 1963; Cartledge 1987, 124–5; 2001c, 29–33; 2002, 131, 134–5. For the various debates concerning the dating of the 'Great Rhetra', see Richer 1998, 93–109; Van Wees 1999, esp., 26–7 n. 1, 35–6 n. 70. On the relationship between Tyrtaios' *Eunomia* and the 'Great Rhetra', see Forrest 1963, 157–66; Tigerstedt 1965–78, 1.52–6. See also the bibliography in Van Wees (1999, 26–7 n. 1). For an overview of the issues surrounding the 'Great Rhetra', see Kennell 2010, 44–9. On the Assembly's prerogatives, see, esp., Cartledge 1987, 124–5, 129–31; Thommen 1996, 38–41; Richer 1998, 356–79.

- 4 Although Herodotos only mentions the Ephors in this passage, both the gravity of the charge and the identity of the defendant make it probable that the Ephors only held a preliminary inquiry before the main trial in the combined court of the Ephorate and Gerousia.
- 5 No fragments of Pausanias' pamphlet survive which can help shed light on either its contents or general purpose. David (1979) has persuasively argued that this work attacked Pausanias' political enemies as violators of the 'Lykourgan constitution' and advocated the abolition of the Ephorate. For recent expositions of the opposing view that Pausanias rather criticized Lykourgos' laws and held him responsible for creating the Ephorate, see Nafissi 1991, 57–62; Van Wees, 1999, 14–17. See also Richer 1998, 35–40 for a detailed discussion and up-to-date bibliography of the scholarly debate on this issue.
- 6 Far less dramatic but equally telling is Plutarch's story concerning Agis II's run-in with the Spartan military commanders known as the polemarchs, who refused to send his allotted rations of food (cf. Hdt. 6.57.3) to his house and then fined him after he later failed to perform the customary sacrifices (Plut. *Lyk.* 12.3).
- 7 Cf. Polyb. 4.81.14; 9.23.3; 23.11.4–5; Plut. *Kleom.* 7.1; Paus. 2.9.1; Livy 34.26.14, 28.1. On this charge, see, esp., Oliva 1971, 243–6; Cartledge and Spawforth 2002, 50–2. Bernini (1977–8) discusses Kleomenes' reasons for making his brother king. On Agis IV, Leonidas II and Kleomenes III, see also Bernini 1978; 1981–2; Marasco 1979; 1981.

CHAPTER 18

Equality and Distinction within the Spartiate Community

Philip Davies

The year 378 BC found a prominent Spartiate facing execution in a politically significant trial. While Sparta's harmost (military governor) at Thespiiai, in Boiotia, Sphodrias had launched an attack upon the harbour of Athens, the Peiraeus.¹ He failed to reach his destination, and succeeded only in looting some rural properties. However, the Athenians responded by arresting a party of Spartan envoys who were in Athens at the time. These men assured the Athenians that this abortive attack was not sanctioned by the Spartan state, and that Sphodrias would be put to death for his actions. Sphodrias was in fact tried *in absentia*, since he so feared the outcome that he refused to return home for the trial. Still he was not found guilty. This was because Agesilaos – the Eurypontid king of Sparta – had been urged by his son Arkhidamos to exert his considerable influence in Sphodrias' favour. Agesilaos argued that throughout his youth this man had exemplified all the expectations of a Spartiate. Even though Sphodrias was guilty, Agesilaos reasoned, it was difficult to kill such a man, for Sparta had need of soldiers of this kind.

This episode is significant on a number of levels. Politically, that Sphodrias was acquitted despite his obvious guilt had direct negative consequences for Sparta's foreign affairs, and ultimately contributed to the demise of Spartan hegemony (see Ruzé, [Chapter 12](#) in this work). At the same time, the detailed narrative of this episode which Xenophon provides (*Hell.* 5.4.20–34) grants us rare insight into the inner workings of Spartan society, its institutions and its values. For example, what Agesilaos in fact says in Sphodrias' defence, according to Xenophon, is that as *pais*, *paidiskos*, and *hēbōn* Sphodrias had consistently performed all of the *kala* – literally the 'fine/honourable things'.

This statement encapsulates a key issue with which we must contend in studying Spartan society. If we wish to reach a complete understanding of the statement's meaning, and how it was intended to excuse Sphodrias' indisputable misconduct, we first have to recognize that the several Greek terms here transliterated have meanings particular to a Spartan context. The Spartans were Greeks, and Spartan society was a Greek society. At the same time, however, other Greeks regarded Sparta as being in various respects exceptional. Spartan society possessed a number of idiosyncratic institutions and practices, elements of which were described using specifically Spartan

vocabulary. Many of the chapters within this work relate to such exceptional aspects of Spartan society. In this chapter, we will consider the extent to which these institutions and practices ‘exceptionalized’ the basis of an individual’s standing within Sparta’s citizen community – the Spartiates – in the classical period. In particular, how far did Sparta’s exceptional institutions, some of which certainly appear to embrace an ethos which we might term egalitarian or meritocratic, offer all Spartiates an opportunity for advancement, or else facilitate the maintenance of a well-established elite within the Spartan citizen stratum? In so doing, we shall also unpick Agesilaos’ very idiomatic defence of Sphodrias.

18.1 Sparta’s Exceptional Egalitarianism

Among the various respects in which our sources regard Sparta as being exceptional, they present the Spartiate community as being exceptionally egalitarian. Spartan society contained glaring inequalities. Most notable among these were the legally enforced distinctions between its three major social strata: the Spartan citizen stratum, or Spartiates; the neighbouring *perioikoi*, whose communities enjoyed limited self-government in return for following the Spartans’ lead in war (see Ducat, [Chapter 23](#) in this volume); and the subservient helots, occupying a status somewhere between that of slave and serf (see Figueira, [Chapter 22](#) in this volume). Disparities are also apparent, as throughout the Greek world, between the rights and status of men and women within Sparta’s citizen stratum (see Millender in this volume, [Chapter 19](#)).

However, the community of male Spartan citizens was in itself comparatively homogeneous. Whereas the citizen population of Athens was administratively separated into ‘Solonic’ classes, based upon divisions of wealth, every Spartiate’s citizen status was dependent upon his ability to contribute the same prescribed amount of produce to his *syssition* – a mess, or dining-group (Arist. *Pol.* 1271a 26–37). This arrangement defined a far smaller citizen population than was the case in Athens, and in the long term it contributed to Sparta’s declining citizen numbers (*oliganthrōpia*) by disfranchising those who were unable to maintain their mess-contributions. However, this requirement did guarantee that all Spartan citizens had in common at least a set minimum level of wealth.

At the same time, Spartan customs placed deliberate restrictions upon the ability of individuals to exploit and display their wealth, at least within particular spheres (Hodkinson (2000) 209–70). One prominent example of such restrictions is laws which had the effect of limiting expenditure on funerary display – a means by which leading Greek families would commonly seek to assert their distinction. In Sparta, men were permitted inscribed

gravestones only if they had died in battle, with even these gravestones being simple affairs; men were not permitted grave goods (Plut. *Lyk.* 27.1–2).² As to the living, Thucydides comments upon the fact that the Spartans had a moderate style of dress, and, more generally, that ‘those possessing the greater amount’ in Sparta in so far as possible adopted the lifestyle of the less wealthy majority (1.6). Aristotle makes similar observations, citing Sparta’s bringing together of rich and poor through their required contributions to the messes, and their uniform, simple style of dress, as democratic features of the Spartan constitution (*Pol.* 1294b 26–9). For both of these authors, the Spartiate community – as opposed to Spartan society as a whole – was notably egalitarian, in the sense that multiple Spartan institutions and practices encouraged the citizens to share a common way of life and thus a sense of unity and uniformity. The same sentiment is apparent in one of the common names of the Spartan citizen community: the *homoioi* – a term often translated as ‘equals’ or ‘peers’, but properly meaning ‘those who are alike/similar’.

This egalitarian ethos can be over-interpreted. In particular, when considering any aspect of Spartan society it is vital to bear in mind that our evidence almost exclusively comes from non-Spartan authors. Even Xenophon, who is one of our most important sources, was an Athenian who spent time in Sparta. When these ‘outsider’ sources consider Spartan society, they automatically judge it in comparison with the ‘norm’ presented by their own experience, and so give us a judgement of Sparta’s comparative exceptionalism (Hansen (2009); Hodkinson (2009); Hansen and Hodkinson (2009)). They are particularly interested in those aspects of Spartan society which were exceptional, with the result that we are better informed regarding Sparta’s areas of exceptionality than regarding those respects in which Sparta did not so significantly differ from other Greek societies. In combination, this means that scholars can draw from the evidence substantially different impressions of Spartan society. Thus, while some scholars have spoken of Sparta as a society which sought to suppress any individual efforts at self-advancement, others have long acknowledged the important role which competition and social differentiation played within Spartan society.³ In the course of this chapter, we will see some of the numerous avenues for advancement and self-advancement which were exploited by individuals within the *comparatively* egalitarian Spartiate community.

18.2 The *Kala* and the Communal Upbringing

Alongside mess-contributions and a common style of dress, Aristotle also cites as a democratic feature of the Spartan constitution the bringing together of rich and poor through Sparta’s communal upbringing (*Pol.* 1294b 22–23) – often referred to as the *agōgē*. While some non-citizens could experience

this,⁴ every Spartan citizen – with the singular exception of a Spartan king's eldest son (Plut. *Ages.* 1.4) – had in common that they had passed through an institutionalized communal upbringing which was exceptional within the classical Greek world. That shared experience was a further component of the egalitarian ethos of the Spartiate community. However, the upbringing also provides an illustration of the limits of that egalitarianism, and the importance of distinction and differentiation within the Spartan citizen stratum.

It is Sparta's communal upbringing which provides us with an explanation for Agesilaos' chosen defence of Sphodrias. The terms *pais*, *paidiskos*, and *hēbōn* refer to age-groups, and although their precise parameters are subject to debate (Tazelaar (1967); Lupi (2000); Ducat (2006a) 71-77), together they denote the period before the age of thirty, at which point a Spartiate was considered to have reached full maturity. Sphodrias must have been at least forty years old at the time of his trial. However, Agesilaos' decision to invoke the testimony of Sphodrias' conduct as a youth is entirely sensible within the social context created by the communal upbringing. During this period a Spartiate youth was under direct public scrutiny, and lasting judgements were formed about him. Sphodrias' case testifies to the fact that a Spartiate's experiences as he went through the upbringing were especially significant for his standing, even long after he had left it.

To identify the individual contests and pursuits in which Sphodrias may have excelled is more problematic. How far we may specify the various elements which constituted the communal upbringing depends very heavily upon how willing we are to trace back to the classical period events and practices which are attested in the Hellenistic and Roman periods; in recent years, scholars have grown increasingly sceptical regarding the level of continuity which we may assume across these periods (Kennell (1995) and in this volume; Ducat (2006a); Richer in this volume). Nonetheless, we are able to sketch out some of its events, its general character, and its significance within Spartan society.

Sparta's communal upbringing might reasonably be described as an on-going series of tests and contests. The most notable individual event associated with the upbringing was a competition in ritualized theft, performed at the altar of Artemis Orthia. Youths would compete to steal the greatest number of cheeses from the altar, in the process running a gauntlet posed by a number of guards armed with whips (Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 2.9). Considerable prestige clearly attached to success: Xenophon rationalizes the whipping which the youths endured as a demonstration that by tolerating pain for a short time, one may achieve enduring esteem (*Lak. Pol.* 2.9). It is certainly possible that success in this competition counted among the 'fine/honourable things' (*kala*) which Sphodrias performed during his youth.

In the case of this 'contest at the altar', we have a clear example of a particular competition in which youths competed, presumably before an audience assembled for the occasion, with honour and esteem (and almost

certainly physical prizes) being bestowed upon those who were most successful. However, the greater number of the activities undertaken by Spartiate youths which our sources preserve do not constitute specific events of this type. Xenophon – our most significant source for the upbringing of the classical period – mentions a number of notable features of Sparta's communal upbringing, and provides each with a rationale relating to the aim of turning Spartiate youths into tough and capable citizen-soldiers. This includes their being required to walk barefoot, permitted to wear only a single type of tunic, provided with limited rations, and expected to steal in order to supplement their diet (*Lak. Pol.* 2.3-8).

Youths were judged for their performance in these activities. For example, Xenophon tells us that the youths' stealing served to make them more resourceful in getting supplies and better prepared for war; thus youths caught stealing were punished not for the act, but for their failure to execute it successfully (2.7-8). Isocrates goes further in his *Panathenaikos*: those youths who steal most successfully are more highly esteemed among their peers, considered to be the best of the youths by the adults, and are likely to gain the highest offices, if they maintain their deceptive character into manhood (212). Isocrates is exaggerating – his *Panathenaikos* is a panegyric to Athens, and an attack on Sparta, in which he focuses upon the stealing practised by Spartiate youths as evidence of the depraved nature of their education (211-214). However, there is no reason to reject his fundamental claim that success in the stealing which occurred within the context of the communal upbringing brought esteem.

Thus Spartiate youths' mundane 'everyday' stealing in various ways paralleled their stealing from the altar of Artemis Orthia in a ritualized competition. However, they differ in that neither this 'everyday' stealing, nor any of the other aforementioned activities and practices which Xenophon describes, were formal contests, performed before an audience assembled for the purpose. Yet observation was necessary if the youths were to be judged by their conduct. The provision of such observers, even in the absence of mass audiences of the kind which attended religious festivals and games, was arguably the most defining feature of Sparta's communal upbringing.

In the first instance, a number of individuals were appointed to supervise the upbringing. An adult Spartiate was appointed as the chief officer responsible for Sparta's youth: the *paidonomos* or 'child-herd'. He had to assist him a staff of Spartiates aged between twenty and thirty, who were tellingly called the *mastigophoroi* – the 'whip-bearers' (*Xen. Lak. Pol.* 2.2). The boys they supervised were divided into companies called *ilai*, each of which would be led by one of 'the keenest of the *eirenes*' (2.11. Cf. 2.5). The term *eirēn* is another item of Spartan terminology. Exactly what age it denotes is a matter of debate, but it is likely to have been around twenty years old.

Each of these posts – *paidonomos*, *mastigophoros*, 'ila captain' – created a

platform for the observation of Spartiate youths by their elders. Furthermore, each of these observers came from within the Spartan citizen stratum. Xenophon approvingly contrasts this arrangement with other Greeks' habit of entrusting their child to a slave attendant (*paidagōgos*: *Lak. Pol.* 2.1). The figures are highly uncertain, but if we were to assume that these posts were filled annually, then by the age of twenty any given Spartiate youth might have been closely observed from such offices by more than fifty individuals. The functioning of the upbringing as a determinant of status will have depended greatly upon the opinions formed and relayed by these officials.

The audience to Sparta's communal upbringing was not composed solely of these appointed supervisors, however. Xenophon states that every citizen had the authority to give youths orders, and to punish them if they did wrong (2.10). Some scholars have interpreted this statement as meaning that many adult Spartiates were commonly involved in supervising the upbringing (MacDowell (1986) 56-58). This may well have been the case, but what Xenophon provides is a general statement that 'whichever of the citizens is present' may instruct youths in 'whatever should seem good'. This statement correlates closely with a later claim by Xenophon that the Spartan lawgiver Lykourgos gave each citizen equal charge of both his own children and the children of others (6.1). What Xenophon describes is a situation in which adult Spartiates were culturally expected to take an active role in the observation of Sparta's youth and were granted the necessary authority to guide and correct youths' behaviour as they saw fit.

This is not to suggest that every adult Spartiate had an equal interest in the progress of every youth. For each youth, there will have been an array of family, friends, and other familiars who were to varying degrees invested in his success within the communal upbringing, and followed it with interest. At the same time, however, we should not underestimate the capacity of individuals, under cultural pressure, to observe and note the conduct of youths within a relatively small and closely-knit social group, even when they are not tied to them personally. Regarding the size of that community, our sources suggest that at the beginning of the fifth century Sparta's male citizen population numbered around 8000 (Hdt. 7.234), but by the mid-fourth century this had fallen to less than 1000 (Arist. *Pol.* 1270a 29-31). Overall, it may well be that most of the people to whom Agesilaos made his defence of Sphodrias had some recollection of that individual's performance in his youth.

This on-going process of observation was critical to the functioning of Sparta's communal upbringing, all the more so as it is likely to have been the primary means of assessing a youth's success. We have no indication that success in the upbringing was 'graded' in any formal sense, beyond the binary distinction between completion and failure. At the same time, we have no surviving evidence for a youth actually failing to complete the upbringing, and how commonly this may have occurred is a matter of debate (Ducat

(2006a) 159; Kennell (1995) 132-134). However, the tests and contests which occurred within the context of the upbringing allowed judgements to be made. Even those elements which were not true activities, but rather practices characteristic of the upbringing, could contribute to the esteem in which a youth was held, facilitating differentiation through the ability of youths to meet, fail to meet, or exceed the expectations placed upon them. Thus, even in the absence of formal recognition, the platform for observation which the communal upbringing provided was vital to the reputation which a Spartiate youth could gain.

If the upbringing's primary significance was as a platform for display and observation, this raises a further question. Our very partial understanding of Sparta's communal upbringing entails that scholars differ greatly in their estimation of how comprehensive it was. What significance was held by activities which did not form part of the communal upbringing *per se*, but in which some Spartiate youths might participate while subject to its special scrutiny? A notable example of such an activity from the realm of athletics (see Christesen in this volume) is provided by the 'Damonon Inscription' (IG 5.1 213). This is a famous fifth-century dedication to Athena Poliachos by one Damonon, which includes a detailed record of his athletic victories stretching back to his childhood, along with the victories of his son Enymakratidas.

These competitions will have had their own audiences, but they were not tied to the communal upbringing in the manner of the contest at the altar of Artemis Orthia, and many of them occurred outside of Sparta, elsewhere in Lakonia and Messenia. Furthermore, these events included equestrian competitions. The raising and training of horses was a restrictively expensive activity, even among Spartiates (Hodkinson (2000) 303-333). It was precisely because of this exclusivity that Spartiates such as Damonon so prominently displayed their equestrian achievements. The training for such competitions is unlikely to have formed part of the communal education undergone by all Spartiate youths. Nonetheless, success in these competitions is likely to have been made more significant by the greater visibility which the upbringing granted to the youth in question.

If activities such as these could also have counted among Sphodrias' *kala*, the term certainly embraced a wide variety of achievements. Yet our understanding of the term can be extended still further. Xenophon says that if any of the youths shirk their duties, the penalty is no longer to have any share in the *kala*; the effect of this sanction is that both the public authorities and those who have care for each youth strive to ensure that he should not, through shirking, become ill-reputed by all in the city (*Lak. Pol.* 3.3). Here the *kala* are not something to be performed or accomplished; they are something which is possessed, and can be lost. However, to judge from Agesilaos' defence of Sphodrias, the *kala* denote more than citizenship in itself, or the conduct which entitles an individual to it. Ultimately, this Spartan term

appears to convey a very broad sense, encapsulating both the good actions performed, and the good reputation enjoyed, by a Spartiate of enviable standing, such as Sphodrias.

18.3 ‘Graduation’ and the Mess

If we wish to identify a moment in which a clear verdict was made upon a Spartiate youth’s success in the communal upbringing, we would most easily find it in his admission to a mess (*syssition*). A youth reached this milestone at around age twenty, prior to his completion of the upbringing. However, it was at this point that he reached his prime (*hēbē*), and so advanced to the last of the three age-groups mentioned by Agesilaos – the *hēbōntes*. This was a transitional age, when a youth was considered no longer to be a child, but not yet to be a fully-matured adult. Thus *hēbōntes* remained subject to a number of constraints (Ducat (2006a) 105-112), even as they took up various attributes of adult life – including membership of a mess.

The mess was a central location in any Spartiate’s life (see Van Wees in this work, [Chapter 9](#)). Beyond being a Spartiate’s regular dining venue, each mess formed part of the organisation of the Spartan army – a Spartiate’s mess-mates were also his companions in the phalanx. Most importantly, membership of a mess was a prerequisite of Spartan citizenship. However, this attribute common to every Spartan citizen also provided an opportunity for differentiation. Plutarch suggests that admission of an individual to a mess was subject to a vote by all the existing members, with a single vote against constituting a veto (*Lyk.* 12.5-6). The details of this account have been questioned, but the initiative in selecting new entrants does appear to have rested with the existing members. This autonomy allowed for some messes to be more exclusive in their admissions than others.

The upbringing afforded older Spartiates abundant opportunity to observe candidates for admission to their mess. Indeed, Xenophon describes youths attending a mess as guests, in a manner which suggests that they were on display (*Lak. Pol.* 3.5). However, it is likely that such guests had already been singled out by means of the Spartan practice of pederasty. A pederastic relationship would typically begin when the younger party – the ‘beloved’ (*erōmenos*) – was around twelve years old, and the older – the ‘lover’ (*erastēs*) – was in his early twenties. Scholars have wondered how active a role an *erastēs*’ mess-mates may have played in his selection of a partner. Certainly, although an *erastēs*’ choice of partner may have been personal, he will have been aware that his mess-mates would judge him for it, all the more so as his partner would be a preferred candidate for admission to their mess. Thus establishment of a pederastic relationship and admission to a mess formed two separate, but related selection processes.

This leaves the question of the criteria on which a youth would be selected. It is natural for us to understand these two ‘tests’ in relation to Sparta’s communal upbringing. When a Spartiate formed a pederastic relationship, or a mess admitted a new member, it was to their benefit to select an individual who had secured a good reputation for himself. Pederastic relationships conventionally began when the younger party was partway through the communal upbringing, and can be perceived as a verdict on a youth’s conduct in the upbringing up to that point. Subsequently, the youth faced selection by a mess: this conveyed a formal endorsement of a kind which the upbringing arguably did not in itself provide, with admission to a more or less prestigious mess constituting a judgement on the distinction of a youth’s conduct. Success in these two selection processes may also have counted among Sphodrias’ *kala*.

The limitation of such an interpretation is that neither of these two ‘tests’ was exclusively concerned with a youth’s performance in the upbringing. In keeping with his philosophical ideals, Xenophon insists that Spartan pederastic relationships were formed between an older Spartiate and a youth ‘whose soul he admired’ (*Lak. Pol.* 2.12-14). However, leaving aside the issue of sexual desire, the wealth, influence and power of a youth’s family are also likely to have been significant factors. Cartledge has observed that such considerations appear to have been prominent in the only two individual pederastic relationships which are recounted by our sources ((2001) 103-105). Xenophon explicitly tells us that one of these relationships, between Agesilaos’ son Archidamos and Sphodrias’ son Kleonymos, was the reason for Agesilaos’ intervention on Sphodrias’ behalf (*Hell.* 5.4.25-33). Furthermore, it is likely that an *erastēs*’ mess-mates would have approved of the influence of such factors upon his selection of a partner: wealth and influence, as much as exemplary character and conduct, were desirable attributes for any prospective entrant to this intimate social group. A Spartiate youth’s conduct in the communal upbringing was probably never the sole criterion by which he advanced.

18.4 Merit versus Esteem: The *Hippeis*

The diverse factors which impacted upon an individual’s standing within the Spartiate community are nicely illustrated by the case of the *hippeis*. Once Spartiate youths became *hēbōntes*, at around twenty years old, there were various roles which they might fulfil. Most notably, they were eligible to serve in the *hippeis*. These ‘horsemen’ were not in fact cavalry, as their name might suggest, but the 300-strong bodyguard of the Spartan kings, representing the cream of Sparta’s manhood. In addition to fighting (on foot) alongside the king on the battlefield, the *hippeis* performed public ceremonial roles, such as

escorting honoured foreign visitors (Hdt. 8.124), and may also have been trusted with special assignments, and internal policing responsibilities.

Xenophon provides a quite detailed account of the selection process for the *hippeis* (Lak. Pol. 4.1-6). Firstly, the Spartan ephors ('overseers') would appoint three *hippagretai* ('choosers of the *hippeis*') from among the eldest of the *hēbōntes*.⁵ These three each then selected 100 of their fellows to serve under them, publicly declaring their reasons in each case. For Xenophon, the effect of this selection process, indeed its primary purpose, was to set the Spartiate youths against each other in a contest of excellence (*aretē*), which would bring all to the peak of 'masculine virtue' (*andragathia*). This contest did not end once the *hippagretai* had made their selection, however; it was after this that one saw 'that form of strife most dear to the gods, and most civic in nature' (4.5). Those who had not been selected were 'at war' with those who had, keeping watch lest their rivals should in any way fall short of the expected standard of conduct. This rivalry also necessitated that all of the youths should maintain themselves in good physical condition, since they would fight whenever they met each other.

The text suggests that these encounters were not mere 'sour grapes': a new board of ephors were elected each year; each year the ephors selected three *hippagretai*, and those *hippagretai* selected their 300 subordinates. In this process, it is likely that a large number of the serving *hippeis* found themselves reselected, but others would leave the *hippeis*: honourably if they had reached the age of 30, and so were no longer *hēbōntes*;⁶ dishonourably if during the intervening year they had shown themselves to be unworthy. Hence, the selection of the *hippeis* provided, at least in theory, an annually-renewed formal recognition of the most outstanding Spartiates between the ages of twenty and thirty.

An anecdote recorded by Plutarch may reflect this ideal (*Mor.* 231b. Cf. 191f; *Lyk.* 25.4). A Spartiate named Pedaritos attended the selection of the *hippeis*, and, not being chosen himself, 'which was considered the foremost honour in the city', he went away happy and smiling. When the ephors asked him why he smiled, he explained that he rejoiced to know that the city had 300 men better than himself. If the Pedaritos here mentioned is, as is likely, the Peloponnesian War harmost and commander, rejection from the *hippeis* clearly was not the end of one's career. However, admission to the *hippeis* is a further achievement which we might count among Sphodrias' *kala*.

Yet, as with establishment of a pederastic relationship and admission to a mess, we may ask how far factors such as birth, influence and wealth intervened in the selection process. The integrity of the process was theoretically guaranteed by its public nature: when the *hippagretai* selected the *hippeis* they had to declare publicly their reasons for appointing each individual. The security of such a safeguard was far from absolute. Our sources give no indication that there was an established means for a

hippagretēs' selections to be challenged, or that he faced any sanction for his decisions, beyond potential verbal dissent and public opprobrium. However, we should not underestimate the significance of this threat. Within a small, tightly-knit community, such as that of the Spartiates, loss of face could be a highly significant punishment, directly counteracting the appreciation of esteem which was one of the principal benefits of service as a *hippagretēs*.

However, public opinion is not an impartial assessor of worth, and an almost unlimited list of attributes might contribute to an individual's reputation. One such potential factor would be athletic prowess. Another anecdote recounted by Plutarch concerns a Spartan wrestler competing in the Olympic games who refused the offer of a bribe, and, with difficulty, defeated his opponent. When asked what he had gained from his victory, he replied that he would fight the enemy in front of his king (*Lyk.* 22.4. Cf. *Mor.* 639e). A likely explanation for his response is that a newly-crowned Olympic victor was a very strong contender for admission to the *hippeis*.

We might reasonably consider athletic prowess legitimate grounds for selecting a royal bodyguard. However, the selection process for the *hippeis* did not prevent a *hippagretēs* from preferring a candidate on the basis of birth, friendship or similar factors. The determinant of whether such an attempt would succeed, and most likely whether it would be made, was the anticipated willingness of the audience, the wider Spartiate community, to endorse that decision. It is unlikely that the selection of a weak incompetent for personal reasons would be well received. On the other hand, if a *hippagretēs* were to select an individual of reasonable talents who happened to be the son of a king, or some other prominent Spartiate, the reaction of the audience might be more favourable. In the case of Pedaritos, who appears to have come from a prominent and well-connected family, Cartledge ((1987) 205) suggests that his statement of contentment is ironic, and that a man of his origins expected to be selected.

We may apply similar caveats to Sparta's communal upbringing. Scholars have emphasized the opportunity which the upbringing provided for a youth of undistinguished parentage to come to the attention of those in positions of power and influence (e.g. Cartledge (1987) 27-28). It is certainly the case that, in the nature of its activities and practices, Sparta's communal upbringing was concerned with actions rather than origins. However, the upbringing's foremost significance was as a platform for observation, and we may ask how impartial the many pairs of eyes that formed the foundation of the upbringing in fact were. The scions of elite lineages will have been more conspicuous to observers both in their successes and in their failures, while there will equally have been some youths whom observers deemed less worthy of their attention.

To evaluate how 'meritocratic' were institutions in any Greek society of the classical period is to apply to the ancient world very modern concepts and

sensibilities. The question is apposite from our perspective in no small part because Spartan institutions such as the communal upbringing and the *hippeis* so notably appear to prioritize the identification of ‘the best’. However, from a Spartiate’s perspective, it may have gone without question that the wealth or influence of a youth’s family were legitimate factors in the appraisal of his standing, or in his admission to an institution. What we may say with reasonable confidence is that the youths who were admitted to the *hippeis* were those who were most highly esteemed, not necessarily those of the greatest ‘objective merit’, as we might understand it.

18.5 Politics and the Spartan Elite

Turning our attention from the institutions associated with Sparta’s youth to its major political offices – the dyarchy, *gerousia*, and *ephoreia*, along with the assembly itself – it quickly becomes clear that ‘objective merit’ here intermingled very deeply with other considerations. In several respects these political institutions acknowledged claims of birth, wealth and influence – the claims of Sparta’s elite – in a far more explicit manner than institutions such as the communal upbringing.

Sparta’s dual-kingship was, of course, accessible only to a very small section of the Spartiate community. As a dyarchy, Sparta at any given time had two kings, drawn respectively from one of its two royal houses: the Agiadaei (‘descendants of Agis’) and the Eurypontidai (‘descendants of Eurypon’). These two men enjoyed significant powers, particularly in the religious and military spheres, along with considerable political influence (see Millender in this volume, ch. 17). The kings also enjoyed a number of privileges which served to assert and reinforce their ‘social primacy’ – their unique status within Spartan society: Spartans would rise from their seats in the kings’ presence (Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 15.6); wherever the kings ate, they were entitled to a double portion (15.4; Hdt. 6.57); at public games they were entitled to front-row seats (6.57); at public sacrifices, in addition to their double portions, they sat first, and led the libations (6.57).

Kingship was rare among Greek states of the classical period, and Sparta’s dyarchy unique. However, the rights of Sparta’s kings, and their very existence, were justified by their exceptional attributes. They claimed direct descent from Sparta’s Heraklid founders, and so included Herakles and ultimately Zeus among their ancestors. Thus they were uniquely well-equipped to act as intercessors between the Spartans and the gods, both at home and on campaign. Of course, for kingship to be hereditary is hardly surprising, and we might reasonably suppose that Sparta’s kings constituted a singular exception to the general egalitarian ethos of the Spartiate community. However, Sparta’s political institutions also privileged the wider Spartan elite

– a number of families who across multiple generations managed to maintain positions in the upper echelons of the Spartan citizen stratum.

Our non-Spartan sources do not provide us with a term which we may say with confidence was used by Spartans to describe their own elite in a collective sense – we lack an identifiable Spartan idiom, such as we have in the case of the term *kala*. However, the Spartan elite is identifiable within our literary evidence in a number of ways. It is described using terms which, although not confirmable as Spartan idiom, are common Greek epithets for elites.⁷ It is also visible in extant cases of lineages whose members appear in significant roles across multiple generations (Hodkinson (2000) 413-416). Thus, for example, our sources refer to three Spartiates with the name Alkidas: one who married well, and was a close friend of Ariston, a Eurypontid king of the mid-sixth century (Hdt. 6.61); one who served as nauarch (fleet commander) in 428/7 (Thuc. 3.16-33), and was co-founder of the Spartan colony Herakleia Trachinia (3.92); and one who was nauarch in 374/3 (Diod. 15.46.1-3). Trusting the Greek convention whereby a name would be passed on through every other generation of a family, it would appear that this lineage maintained a prominent position within the Spartiate community for at least two centuries.

Lastly, our sources distinguish elite Spartiates by referring to their notable attributes. Thus, for example, Herodotus describes the Spartiates Sperthias and Boulis as being ‘well-born, and ranked foremost with regard to wealth’ (7.134). Claims to wealth and good birth are common indicators of elite status, and occur repeatedly in relation to Sparta. Xenophon states that the Spartiates’ equal mess-contributions meant that wealth was not a matter of serious concern among them, but at the same time notes that wealthy Spartiates would supplement the required contributions of their mess-mates with luxuries such as wheaten bread (*Lak. Pol.* 5.3, 7.3. Cf. *Ath.* 4.16.35-19.40). Such beneficence is attested on a far grander scale in the case of the elite Spartiate Likhas, who we are told granted hospitality to foreigners visiting Sparta for the Gymnopaidiai festival (*Xen. Mem.* 1.2.61). Another reliable indicator of wealth is the raising of horses, and victories in equestrian competitions attest to the wealth of Sparta’s elite (Hodkinson (2000) 303-333).

As to good birth, our sources mention multiple Spartan families which laid claim to heroic descent. Most notable among these are the Agiad and Eurypontid lineages, who, in common with some non-royal Spartan lineages (Plut. *Lys.* 2.1, 24.3), claimed descent from Herakles. There are also the Aigeidai, a ‘great tribe in Sparta’ (Hdt. 4.149), whose namesake Aigeus connected them to both royal houses, as well as granting them distinguished genealogical connections further afield (Malkin (1994) 99-111). Another lineage claimed descent from Agamemnon’s herald, Talthybios; because of their ancestry, these Talthybiadai held the right to provide the herald for any

Spartan despatch (Hdt. 7.134). Elsewhere Herodotus claims that in Sparta heralds, pipers, and cooks inherited their occupations (6.60), perhaps indicating that at least two other elite lineages also laid claim to heroic ancestors tied to hereditary professions.

It has been suggested that, in a manner not dissimilar to the special recognition which the Talthybiadaí received, the Spartan elite as a whole was granted recognition via the *gerousia*. This ‘council of elders’ served significant judicial and legislative roles: it was Sparta’s senior court, judging major cases such as murder (Arist. *Pol.* 1275b 9-10; Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 10.2); it also served a probouleutic function, considering motions to determine if and in what form they should be presented to the Spartan assembly, as well as potentially having a power of veto (Plut. *Lyk.* 6); more generally, members of the *gerousia* appear to have exercised an influential advisory role (Hdt. 5.40; Xen. *Hell.* 3.3.8). The *gerousia* comprised the two kings, along with 28 *gerontes* elected in a process which Aristotle criticized as ‘childish’ (*Pol.* 1271a 9-10); Plutarch describes candidates presenting themselves silently to the Spartan assembly, while a panel of chosen men sat in a nearby house, unable to see the proceedings, and judged which candidate had received the loudest applause (*Lyk.* 26).

However flawed the selection process, our sources concur regarding the *gerontes*’ merit: Aristotle describes election to the *gerousia* as a prize for virtue (*Pol.* 1270b 24-25); Plutarch calls the *gerontes* ‘the best and wisest of the good and wise’ (*Lyk.* 26.1); Xenophon states that the Spartan lawgiver Lykourgos placed election to the *gerousia* at the end of life so that even in old age Spartiates would not neglect virtue (*Lak. Pol.* 10.1). At the same time, however, Herodotus comments that if one of the kings was unable to attend a meeting of the *gerousia*, his nearest relative among the *gerontes* would serve as his proxy (6.57); this assumes that the *gerontes* would always include relatives of both kings. Aristotle compounds this impression. Discussing Sparta as an example of a mixed constitution, Aristotle states that such a constitution requires that all sections of society have an interest in maintaining it; Sparta achieves this because the kings have their royal honour, the ‘fine and noble’ (*kaloi kāgathoi*) have the *gerousia*, and the people (*dēmos*) have the *ephoreia*, which is selected from out of all (*Pol.* 1270b 21-26).

The term *kaloi kāgathoi* is an epithet of praise, indicating those who are superior – physically, morally or socially. Thus, Aristotle appears to be saying that the *gerousia* was restricted to Sparta’s elite. Further passages of his *Politics* reinforce this reading: the Spartan people (*dēmos*) are loyal to the constitution because they elect the *gerontes* and share in the *ephoreia* (1294b 29-31); the *gerontes* provide the oligarchic element of the Spartan constitution, and the ephors the democratic, since the latter office is ‘drawn from the people’ (1265b 37-40); the *gerousia* employs election of a ‘dynastic type’ (1306a 18) – Aristotle having previously described *dynasteia* as

indicating a form of oligarchy in which offices are filled by hereditary succession and the office-holders govern without the restraint of law (1292b 4-10).

In combination, some scholars have taken Aristotle's testimony as evidence that membership of the *gerousia* was legally restricted to a recognized Spartan elite (Forrest (1968) 63; David (1981) 44-45). Aristotle's observations do not require such a conclusion, however. Membership of the *gerousia* was open only to 'elders' – those over the age of sixty (Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 10) – but once gained, it was a life-tenure office (Arist. *Pol.* 1270b 38-41). Thus, places in the *gerousia* will have become available only at irregular intervals, on which occasions there will have been considerable competition to win the vacant seat. Sparta's leading families will certainly have wanted 'their' candidate to gain membership of this prestigious and influential body, and in pursuing this goal they will have had greater access to resources than the mass of the population, and a greater ability to mobilize support. Their competition is likely to have weeded out any undistinguished Spartiate who sought election. Thus, even in the absence of formal restrictions, the competition for election to the *gerousia* may have resulted in its being perceived, both inside and outside Sparta, as a preserve of the Spartan elite.

Consequently, for the majority of the Spartiate community the most realistic prospect of holding major political office was election as one of the five ephors ('overseers'). An ephor held his position for only a single year, and it seems not to have been permissible to hold the office twice (Westlake (1976)). The consequent need to find an entirely new set of ephors every year meant that the *ephoreia* was accessible to a much larger proportion of the Spartiate community than the *gerousia*. In fact, Aristotle complained that the ephors were frequently poor, and so liable to corruption (*Pol.* 1270b 7-10). The difficulties of finding high-calibre candidates to serve as ephors will have become more pronounced as Sparta's citizen population declined over the course of the classical period, and will have been particularly acute in Aristotle's time. However, precisely what Aristotle means by 'poor' in this context is uncertain, and it should be noted that he equally accuses the *gerontes* of venality (1271a 3-5). Service as an ephor was the only major political office available to Spartiates between the ages 30-60, and although the competition for election to the *ephoreia* will not have matched that to the *gerousia*, the office will certainly have been sought after.

Despite its relatively brief duration, service as an ephor certainly granted a Spartiate considerable powers (Richer (1998) 153-523). The ephors did not hold a legislative role *per se*, but did exercise a wide array of potent executive functions: they convened the assembly (e.g. Xen. *Hell.* 2.2.19), and one of their number presided over it (e.g. Thuc. 1.87); they admitted foreign envoys to Lakonia (e.g. Xen. *Hell.* 2.2.13), and expelled them (e.g. Hdt. 3.148), and it was presumably the presiding ephor who granted such envoys permission to

address the Spartan assembly; they called out the Spartan levy, and thus had the power to determine how large an expeditionary force would be. In the judicial sphere, in addition to judging minor disputes (Arist. *Pol.* 1275b 9-10), the ephors exercised a broadly-defined power of review, which gave them the authority to fine individuals, dismiss or imprison any official, or bring them to trial for their life (Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 8.3-4).

We might think of the ephors as Sparta's civic authority – the representatives of the Spartiate community which had elected them. This role is particularly apparent in their interactions with Sparta's kings. When in their seats of office, the ephors were the only individuals who did not rise in the kings' presence (Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 15.6), and each month the two parties exchanged oaths in which the kings swore to maintain the established laws, and the ephors swore 'on behalf of the city' to maintain the kingship for as long as this was the case (15.7). Though it is likely to be a post-classical invention, Plutarch claims that the ephors observed the night sky once every eight years, and, if they observed a shooting star, immediately suspended the kings for having in some way offended the gods (*Agis et Cleom.* 11.3-6). More generally, the kings were not exempt from the ephors' potent right of review (Thuc. 1.131).

However, despite the ephors' formal parity with the kings, and powers of oversight, scholars generally agree that the kings were the most significant of Sparta's political offices (Cloché (1949); de Ste. Croix (1972) 138-149; Thomas (1974); Cartledge (1987) 139-159). Ultimately, the ephors were limited, not by the scope of their powers, but by the duration of their service. An ephor held office for only a single year. Although he was at least sixty years old when elected, a *gerōn* held office for life, and would generally serve for considerably more than a year. Most importantly, the length of a Spartan king's reign was frequently measured in decades, with the average for the classical period being more than twenty years. In that time, a king could exploit his considerable resources to form alliances and followings, and consolidate his power and influence. The indefinite duration of a king's reign granted him the opportunity to expand beyond the enumerated powers of his office to an extent that few other individuals would be able to achieve, least of all within the space of a single year. Indeed, a capable and well-established king would frequently count *gerontes* and ephors among his partisans. Thus, Xenophon says that the men who tried Sphodrias (presumably *gerontes*, as Sparta's senior judges) were divided between 'the friends of Agesilaos', 'the friends of Kleombrotos' (the Agiad king), and 'those who stood in the middle', between these two factions (*Hell.* 5.4.25).

Of course, all Spartiates were able to participate in the assembly itself. Scholars are divided on how significant a role the assembly played in Sparta's political decision-making (Andrewes (1966) 1-8; de Ste. Croix (1972) 126-131; Cartledge (1987) 120-131; Kelly (1981)). Its initiative was certainly less than that of its Athenian equivalent, but that does not require that it was a

mere ‘rubber-stamp’ (Cartledge (1987) 129). A separate issue, however, is how prominent a role an individual citizen could play in the assembly – how far could the assembly serve as a platform for a Spartiate to display his judgement. Individuals who address the assembly within our sources are almost without exception directly identified as office-holding Spartiates or representatives of foreign states (e.g. Thuc. 1.67-86; Diod. 11.50.6; Xen. *Hell.* 6.1.2-16).⁸

This does not necessitate that the right to address the assembly was legally restricted to magistrates, or other specific individuals. However, even in the absence of such formal prescription, the cultural expectation may have been that an individual should have a greater justification for addressing the assembly than simply being a citizen. Under these circumstances, the ability of a Spartiate to address the assembly and so display his judgement may well itself have been contingent upon the esteem in which he was already held within the Spartiate community. Such a situation accords neatly with the condition of Sparta’s major political offices. The *gerousia* was, at least in effect, a preserve of the elite, while the limitations placed upon the ephors – the most democratic of Sparta’s political offices – left them at a disadvantage to Sparta’s hereditary rulers. Cultural expectations favoured kings and *gerontes* in their contribution to the Spartan assembly, and thus, like Sparta’s political offices, the assembly favoured the elite.

18.6 Patronage and Military Command

Military service was a fundamental element of the duties and identity of a Spartan citizen, and an individual’s performance on the battlefield could decisively alter his standing within the Spartiate community. Furthermore, for a Spartiate who had reached full maturity and left the communal upbringing, military command was in various respects more attractive than political office. Until he reached the age of sixty, the only major political office for which he was eligible was the *ephoreia*, with its brief duration and consequent limitations. In comparison, Sparta’s military offices were far more openly defined in their appointment process, remit, and duration. However, that same lack of prescription made these offices even more subject to the influence of a small number of powerful, overwhelmingly elite individuals.

At the most basic level, the assembly and the army provided two further arenas in which Spartiates could display their worth under the observation of their community. However, while an individual’s ability to distinguish himself in the assembly was in most cases constrained, every able-bodied Spartiate could perform in the phalanx, whether as a common soldier, or as one of the several grades of officer which existed within the Spartan phalanx’s complex hierarchy (Thuc. 5.66; Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 11.4). Here, a Spartiate’s

conduct will certainly have been visible to his mess-mates, who, owing to the role of the messes in the organisation of the Spartan phalanx, would be his immediate neighbours. The significance for a Spartiate of how his actions were judged by this intimate, but fundamental, social circle will in itself have been considerable. However, as with the upbringing, we should not underestimate the capacity of Spartiate observers to note the conduct of any other member of their community, whether or not they shared a personal relationship. Any Spartiate serving in the phalanx would know that he was on display to his community as a whole, and that praise or blame would quickly circulate.

Consequently, Spartiates on campaign will have felt under acute pressure to live up to the demanding ideal of the unflinching Spartan warrior. If a Spartiate died bravely in battle, he might be named one of the best (*aristoi*). If, on the other hand, he failed to meet his community's expectations, he might well be ostracized as a 'trembler' (*tresas*). There is some debate regarding how formalized and consistently applied this status was (Ducat (2006b)). However, the archetype of a trembler is provided by the Spartiate Aristodemos. One of Leonidas' famed 300 Spartans, Aristodemos missed the final battle at Thermopylai either because he was sick, or because he had been despatched with a message (Hdt. 7.229-230). Whatever the reason, on account of his survival he was shunned by his fellow Spartiates, and called a coward (7.231). This social exclusion did not prevent him from fighting, and dying, at the battle of Plataia. However, even this was not enough to cleanse his reputation. After the battle the Spartans judged that Aristodemos had abandoned his post in the phalanx and madly thrown himself at the enemy because of the wretchedness of his situation; another Spartiate, who had died without such a death-wish, was named *aristos* in his place (9.71).

Beyond general service in the phalanx and progression through its internal hierarchy lay higher-level military commands. One such office, the *nauarkhia* (fleet command), resembled the *ephoreia* in being a non-renewable one-year post – restrictions which the Spartans had to circumvent in order to facilitate the continued leadership of Lysandros, who secured Sparta's ultimate victory in the Peloponnesian War (see Powell, [Chapter 11](#) in this work). This exception aside, however, military commands were not prescriptively defined in the manner of Sparta's major political offices. Indeed, until halfway through the Peloponnesian War this appears to have been true of the *nauarkhia* (Sealey (1976)). Commanders were appointed as and when need arose, without a defined term-limit. Most significantly, there was – for generals on land – no restriction upon holding successive commands, and so a Spartiate could build something approaching a career in a way which was not possible in the political sphere (Hodkinson (1993) 155-157). This made military commands desirable, and Xenophon – who lived through the period of Spartan hegemony – complains about how 'those deemed Sparta's

foremost' all want to serve as harmosts abroad (*Lak. Pol.* 14.4).

In the case of the Peloponnesian War commander Brasidas, our sources allow us to sketch one such career. Early in the war, Brasidas on his own initiative led 100 men in the relief of the town of Methone, which was under assault. For this 'boldness', he became the first person in the war to receive official commendation in Sparta (Thuc. 2.25). It is unlikely to be coincidence that, shortly after this, Brasidas served as an ephor (Xen. *Hell.* 2.3.10) – here, military achievement brought political success. Brasidas' rank at the time of Methone is unclear, but in the years following he received increasingly responsible positions: he was sent as an advisor to two beleaguered nauarchs (Thuc. 2.85-94, 3.69-81); he was wounded whilst leading an assault on the Athenian fortifications at Pylos (4.11-12); most notably, he was despatched to lead a force in Khalkidike, and bring the cities there over from Athens to Sparta – a task which he performed with great success (4.70-5.11). Brasidas' career was ultimately cut short by his death from wounds suffered during the Battle of Amphipolis, his last victory (5.10-11). One possible explanation of Sphodrias' botched assault on the Athenian Peiraieus was that he hoped similarly to impress the home authorities with a bold venture; certainly Xenophon suggests such a motivation in the similar case of Phoibidas, who seized the *acropolis* of Thebes supposedly without authorisation (*Hell.* 5.2.28; see Ruzé, [Chapter 12](#) in this work).

Our sources do not present an entirely clear picture of how far such military appointments had to be authorised by the home authorities. In one instance King Agis summons two men from Sparta to take up commands, seemingly on his own initiative (Thuc. 8.5), but in another he appears merely to propose an individual for a particular mission (Xen. *Hell.* 1.1.35). Certainly, there are numerous instances in which generals in the field appoint harmosts and other commanders as needed from among their own men (e.g. Thuc. 4.132, 8.28; Xen. *Hell.* 2.2.2, 4.2.25). In such cases, the home authorities can at most have approved their choices after the event. Overall – and particularly in comparison to Sparta's political offices – military commands frequently appear to be in the gift of individuals, whether in the field or at home.

This lends particular significance to the question of on what basis such appointments were made. The skills and suitability of a candidate were of course an important factor. In the case mentioned above, Agis proposes sending Klearkhos on a mission to disrupt Athens' grain supply on the entirely sensible grounds that he was *proxenos* of Byzantion, and so had knowledge of, and connections in, the intended theatre of operations (Mitchell (1997) 73-89). Each of Brasidas' commands also appears to follow on naturally from his preceding success. In many other cases, however, it is clear that the promotion of relatives or partisans was a prominent factor. For example, it was King Kleombrotos who appointed Sphodrias as harmost of Thespiiai (Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.15), and in so doing he was unquestionably

advancing a member of his personal following – as was Agesilaos when he later appointed Phoibidas to the same post (5.4.41).

Some scholars have argued that a strong Spartan king was able to secure the selection of his partisans as ephors and *gerontes* (Andrewes (1966) 8-10; de Ste. Croix (1972) 149). This is debatable. However, there is no doubt that a king could secure the appointment of his followers as harmosts and commanders. In another instance, Agesilaos appointed as nauarch his own brother-in-law Peisandros (3.4.29).⁹ Xenophon himself notes that Peisandros lacked naval experience (3.4.29), foreshadowing his subsequent defeat and death in the highly significant Battle of Knidos (4.3.10-12). We may also suspect Agesilaos' involvement in the multiple commands held by his half-brother, Teleutias (4.4-5.3 *passim*). As 'commanders-in-chief' of the Spartan army, the kings are particularly prominent in this area, but they were not the only ones capable of such acts of patronage: we are told that Anaxibios 'arranged' his appointment as harmost of Abydos through his friendship with the ephors (4.8.32); when he was appointed to lead a campaign against Olynthos, Eudamidas also secured from the ephors a command for his brother (5.2.24); Lysandros, who was a prominent commander and influential individual in his own right, arranged both that he should be appointed harmost of Athens, and that his brother should be appointed nauarch (2.4.28). This apparent capacity to co-opt one's relatives and associates into military commands will certainly have contributed to the fact that a large proportion of Sparta's military commanders are identifiable as members of the elite (Hodkinson (1993) 157-159).

That these cases involved patronage does not entail that the individuals in question lacked the skills required for their posts – although the case of Agesilaos' brother-in-law Peisandros shows that this was a possibility. By the same token, the evident talent of Brasidas – who himself possessed foreign connections suggestive of elite status (Thuc. 4.78) – does not exclude the possibility that he benefited from patronage, although this is not explicitly stated in our sources. Political intrigue certainly impacted upon his career in other ways: in at least one instance a request from him for reinforcements was refused apparently because of other prominent Spartiates' jealousy at his success (Thuc. 4.108). When a king or other office-holder was deciding whether to appoint someone to a command, he will have taken a number of considerations into account: the person's ability and reliability, but also their connections to himself, their wealth, their influence. Decisions may have been tempered by the prospect of public opprobrium: we may imagine that Agesilaos' choice of nauarch was the subject of criticism in Sparta after the defeat at Knidos, or Kleombrotos' choice of harmost after Sphodrias' failed venture. Ultimately, though, these were not strong safeguards, and in some cases family ties or the rewarding of a partisan will have taken priority over 'objective merit'. The open definition which made military command so

attractive also had the effect of making it a resource to be exploited by the kings, and the wider office-holding Spartan elite.

18.7 Conclusions

Sparta's exceptional institutions had a profound impact on the basis of an individual's standing within the Spartiate community. The tying of citizenship to completion of the communal upbringing and membership of a mess provided Spartiates with shared experiences which fostered the egalitarian ethos our non-Spartan sources so frequently remark upon. That ethos had notable limitations, however. Whatever the significance of the mess as a universal institution, the process of admission meant that individual messes differed in the wealth and influence of their membership; the most exclusive messes are likely to have been preserves of the elite. At first sight, we may identify in the upbringing a more 'meritocratic' sensibility. It provided a stage upon which observers could distinguish between participating youths on the basis of their performance in its diverse activities and practices. However, a good performance in the upbringing did not guarantee a youth admission to a prestigious mess. By the same token, the kings and other individuals in a position to appoint military commanders in many cases used this to reward and advance their followers and familiars. Even the selection process for the *hippeis*, which theoretically sought out Sparta's best young men, was not faultless: a host of considerations other than 'objective merit' might advance an individual, most obviously if he hailed from Sparta's elite. Most importantly, the wider Spartiate community, who were the observers and ultimate arbiters of these processes, may well have regarded as entirely natural the acknowledgment of such factors. Such an attitude is perhaps reflected in their election of overwhelmingly elite Spartiates to the *gerousia*. Under these circumstances, each of the discussed institutions to some extent facilitated the ongoing prominence of a well-established elite within this *comparatively* egalitarian community.

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NOTES

- 1 For more detailed discussion of Sphodrias, see Hodkinson (2007); Parker (2007).
- 2 Plutarch also states that only women 'of the *hierai*' were permitted inscribed gravestones. However, the nature of these 'sacred women' is a matter of debate. See den Boer (1954) 288–98; Brulé and Piolot (2004); Millender in this work, [Chapter 19](#).
- 3 In his major study of the methods by which individuals asserted elite status within the Greek world, Duplouy emphasizes the variability of such processes across differing Greek societies by contrasting Athens and Sparta: just as some Athenians might choose not to engage persistently in the never-ending contest for social prestige, he argues, some instances of individual distinction are apparent even in Sparta, a society which maintained a strict equality among its citizens, and in comparison to other societies suppressed any strategy for personal social advancement ((2006) 280–1). Against this assessment, one may contrast Finley's seminal essay on the character of Spartan society ((1975) 164–71).
- 4 Youths participated in the upbringing from at least three minority social groups who were not, strictly speaking, Spartiates: the children of certain foreigners, who having been sent to Sparta became *trophimoi* or 'Spartan-raised'; the bastard sons (*nothoi*) of Spartiate men, perhaps by helot mothers; and *mothakes* – a more debated group, who appear to have been the children of disfranchised Spartan families, who participated in the communal upbringing under the patronage of a prosperous Spartiate, and served as 'foster-brother' to his son. See Furuyama (1991); Hodkinson (1997).
- 5 The association of the *hippeis* with internal policing hinges upon

Xenophon's description of one of the *hippagretai* as being involved in the arrest of Kinadon, a would-be revolutionary (*Hell.* 3.3.9). This may alternatively indicate that the supervisory role of the *hippagretai* extended beyond the *hippeis* to other young Spartiates. See Cartledge (2002) 235; Ducat (2006) 18; Figueira (2006) 59.

- 6 Here I differ from Figueira ((2006) 65–6), who suggests that there was no upper age-limit for membership of the *hippeis*.
- 7 Paul Cartledge has suggested to me that *prōtos*, a Greek term on various occasions used by our sources to describe individuals as being among the 'first/foremost' of the Spartiate community (e.g. *Hdt.* 4.146; *Thuc.* 4.108, 5.15; *Xen. Lak. Pol.* 14.4), may in fact be a Spartan idiom, more egalitarian in spirit than the common elite epithet *aristos* – 'best'.
- 8 Prothoos, who is cited as a potential exception to this rule, is likely to have been an ephor or *gerōn*, given the immediately preceding mention of 'the home authorities' (*Xen. Hell.* 6.4.2–3).
- 9 Agesilaos was specially empowered to select a nauarch in this case as part of his Asia Minor campaign (*Xen. Hell.* 3.4.27).

CHAPTER 19

Spartan Women

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While many aspects of Spartan society fascinated the Lakedaimonians' fellow Greeks, few evoked the strong reactions routinely roused by the Spartans' supposedly powerful and licentious females. Consider, for example, Aristophanes' comic caricature of Spartan womanhood in his *Lysistrata* of 411 BCE, where we meet Lampito, the muscular and busty Spartan female who can throttle an ox with her bare hands (81–3). Equally memorable is the fifth-century historian Herodotos' characterization of the Agiad princess Gorgo as a precocious eight-year-old who protects her father, Kleomenes I (reign c.520–c.490), against bribery (5.51.2–3). Far more striking is Euripides' *Andromache* of c.425 in both its portrayal of the Spartan princess Hermione's violent sexual jealousy toward her husband's Trojan concubine and its focus on the mythical royal family's topsy-turvy gender dynamics. While attempting to protect Andromache against the depredations of his grandson's Spartan wife and of her easily manipulated father, Menelaos, the aged Peleus castigates Menelaos' lack of control over his womenfolk and Spartan female license in general (590–604):

You call yourself a man, coward of cowards bred?

What right have you to be reckoned as a man?

You, who lost your wife to a Phrygian,

having left your house and hearth unlocked and unattended,

as if you had a modest wife at home

instead of the most wanton of women. Even if she wanted,

no Spartan girl could be modest.

They leave their homes empty,

and with their thighs bared and robes ungirt,

they share the race-courses and the wrestling grounds with the young men

– things which I find intolerable! Is there any need to wonder then

if you do not train your women to be self-controlled?

You should ask Helen, who abandoned your bonds of love

and went rampaging out of the house
with her young man to a foreign land.¹

19.1 Myth, Mirage, and Sources

This belief in Spartan female liberation and influence not only had currency in many fifth-century works but also figured in fourth-century works, such as Plato's *Laws*, which criticizes Spartan lawgivers for allowing the female half of the *polis* to indulge in luxury, expense, and a disorderly way of life (806c; cf. 742c, 774c, 785a). Aristotle's roughly contemporaneous *Politics* goes further in its diatribe against Spartan female license, wealth, and influence (1269b12–1270a34). Several of Plutarch's (c. 50–120 CE) later biographies feature politically and economically influential Spartan women, such as the sword-wielding Agiad queen, Archidamia, who ostensibly opposed the Spartan elders' plan to send the women to Crete in the face of Pyrrhos' invasion of Laconia in 272. According to Plutarch, Archidamia argued that the women would not want to live if Sparta were destroyed. The women supported her contention by helping to dig a trench to stop Pyrrhos' elephants and by aiding the defense of Sparta in numerous ways (*Pyrrh.* 27.4, 6–9; 29.5, 8; cf. Polyainos, *Strat.* 8.49). In his *Moralia* Plutarch further suggests that Spartan women's physical training prepared them to render such military assistance to their *polis* (*Mor.* 227d).

The image of the empowered Spartan female enjoyed longevity as part of the 'Spartan mirage', the nexus of negative and positive conceptions about the Spartans that has shaped both ancient and modern treatments of ancient Lakedaimon. As an element of this 'imaginary literary tradition about ancient Sparta' (Cartledge 2001a, 169), Sparta's ostensibly virile women have been viewed as part and parcel of a *polis* that was culturally austere, militaristically oriented, and brutal in its subjugation of its helots. Over the last few decades numerous studies have reassessed popular images of ancient Sparta and have provided nuanced readings of many aspects of Lakedaimonian society, including the Spartans' attitude toward warfare (Hodkinson 2006) and complex relationship with the helots (Luraghi and Alcock 2003). Modern scholarship, nevertheless, has found it more difficult to part with the idea of Spartan women as unusually independent and powerful in comparison with other Greek women, especially those of Athens (cf. Bradford 1986; Kunstler 1987; Zweig 1993; Fantham et al. 1994, 56–66; Pomeroy 1975, 35–9; 2002).

A number of scholars, however, have questioned the reality behind representations of Spartan female empowerment and have called for a closer examination of the provenance of the available information on Spartan women (Millender 1999; 2009; Powell 1999; Thommen 1999; Cartledge

2001c; Hodkinson 2004). Greater attention to the possible bias inhering in such evidence is warranted by the fact that the image of the powerful Spartan woman that figures so largely in the ancient sources first developed in Athens in the context of Athens' long rivalry with Sparta for hegemony in the Aegean during the latter half of the fifth century. Many extant depictions of Spartan women thus reveal less about the Spartan female experience than about fifth-century Athenian self-definition (Millender 1999). Plutarch's depictions of powerful Spartan women demand equal caution, given his moralization, dramatic embellishment, and dependence on earlier sources such as the third-century BCE historian Phylarchos, who had a taste for heroic females (David 1981, 145–8, 162–9; Powell 1999). Particularly suspect are Plutarch's references to Spartan female military activity, given both the earlier sources' comments on Spartan women's lack of preparation for the realities of combat (cf. Pl. *Leg.* 806a–b; Xen. *Hell.* 6.5.28; Arist. *Pol.* 1269b34–9) and these females' value as child-bearers (cf. Napolitano 1987; Powell 2004).

As this scholarly tug-of-war should indicate, the sources constitute a problem for the historian who attempts to learn about women's lives and position in Spartan society (cf. Thommen 1999, 130–5; Pomeroy 2002, 139–70). The evidence on Spartan women, to be sure, is relatively abundant, beginning with Alkman's late-seventh-century poems known as the *Partheneia*, which provide information concerning Spartan girls' participation in choruses and footraces. Much of the information that we possess on Spartan women, however, comes from fifth-century works, such as Herodotos' *Histories* (esp. 5.51.2–3, 6.52.2–7, 7.239.4), Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* (78–84), and those Euripidean tragedies that deal with the aftermath of the Trojan War (cf. Millender 1999, 356–63). Spartan women also figure prominently in a number of fourth-century Athenian works, especially Xenophon's *Lakedaimoniōn Politeia* (1.3–10) and Aristotle's *Politics* (1269b12–1270a34). These women's experience – or Athenian conceptions of their position in Sparta – also probably shaped Plato's treatment of women in his *Republic* (Book Five) and *Laws* (804d–806c, 814a–c, 833c–834d). Spartan women continued to feature in works written from the Hellenistic to the early Imperial Roman periods, but the evidence is sporadic and fragmentary until we reach Plutarch, whose biographies and collections of both Laconian *apophthegmata* (sayings) and customs (*Mor.* 208b–242d) furnish a treasure trove of material on the Spartan female experience. Pausanias' second-century CE guide to Laconia and the encyclopedic works of authors such as his contemporary, Pollux of Naukratis, also provide useful information.

Aside from Alkman's *Partheneia*, all of the literary evidence that we have concerning Spartan women comes from non-Spartan authors.² All of our extant literary accounts of Spartan women were also the products of male writers, many of whom highlight the more sensational aspects of the Spartan female experience and focus on royal women. In addition, we cannot forget

the distorting influence of the ‘Spartan mirage’ on many sources (cf. Ducat 2006, 223; *contra* Pomeroy 2002, viii). As we have seen, for example, much of our evidence appears in fifth-century Athenian-based works that reflect an essentially Athenocentric conceptualization of Sparta as a barbarized ‘other’ against which the Athenians could define themselves and validate their social, cultural, and political structures, along with their hegemonic aspirations in Hellas (cf., esp., Millender 1996; 1999; 2002). Scholars, in turn, have long viewed Xenophon as an uncritical Lakonophile. His corpus, however, provides plenty of criticism of Spartan society (cf. Humble, forthcoming; Millender 2012, and forthcoming), and his direct experience of life in Sparta makes him a valuable source on Spartan institutions. Later sources entail other problems, particularly their chronological and geographical distance from archaic and classical Sparta as well as their dependence on earlier sources that are not necessarily trustworthy. Nevertheless, works such as Plutarch’s biographies can illuminate many aspects of Spartan society, as long as they are handled with caution.³

Ancient Sparta is also disobliging in terms of epigraphic evidence (cf. Millender 2001, 138–41), especially before the Roman period, when public inscriptions became relatively abundant and provide evidence on the prominent place of women in Roman Sparta as priestesses (cf. Pomeroy 2002, 123–8 and Lafond, [Chapter 15](#), this work). Excavations, however, have uncovered a number of objects capable of illuminating the Spartan female experience, such as the masks, plaques, reliefs, and figurines recovered from the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia, located on the west bank of the Eurotas River (cf. Carter 1988; Foxhall and Stears 2000, 7–8; Hodkinson 2000, 288–93; 2004, 109–10; on Artemis Orthia, see Dawkins et al. 1929). Equally important is the series of bronze votive statues and handles to mirrors or *paterai* (offering dishes), likely produced or influenced by Laconian workshops and dating from c.570 to c.470 BCE. Scholars have identified these objects as portraits of semi-nude or naked Spartan girls engaged in athletic or ritual activity (Scanlon 1988; Stewart 1997, 29–34, 108–19, 232–4).

While the study of the Spartan female experience is thus beset with numerous obstacles, the ancient sources can provide much information on Spartan women as long as we approach the evidence carefully, on its own terms, and are vigilant regarding its context, limits, and ideological roots. In this chapter I will focus on those aspects of the Spartan female experience for which the evidence is relatively abundant and reliable: education and connected ritual activity, marriage and sexuality, economic power, and political influence.

19.2 Education and Initiation

A number of sources provide information concerning the education of Spartan

girls; but we still know far less about this phase of their experience than about the education of boys, and scholars continue to debate many aspects of this issue (cf. Ducat 1998; 2006, 223–47; Scanlon 1988; Thommen 1999, 135–40; Cartledge 2001c, 113–14; Pomeroy 2002, 3–32). For example, work on the domestic and votive deposits of weaving equipment and textile-related artifacts from the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia and the Spartan acropolis (cf. Foxhall and Stears 2000; Pomeroy 2002, 30–32; 2004, 209–10) has challenged the traditional belief that Spartan girls did not receive training in more traditionally feminine skills such as wool-working.⁴ There is also continued disagreement concerning the modern notion that homosexual relations played the same role in Spartans girls' enculturation as it did in that of the boys, since this view is based on particularly thin evidence (Plut. *Lyk.* 18.4).⁵

As for the content of Spartan female education, we know relatively little about girls' study of reading and writing. Herodotos recounts that Gorgo, the daughter of Kleomenes I and later the wife of Leonidas I (c.490–480), was responsible for decoding the secret message that the exiled Eurypontid king Damaratos (c.515–c.491) sent to the Lakedaemonians concerning Xerxes' plan to attack Hellas (7.239.4). While this account suggests that Gorgo was familiar with wooden writing tablets, it reveals nothing more about her literacy. Gorgo's educational experience as an Agiad princess also does not necessarily reflect that of the average Spartan girl. We should likewise approach with caution both Sokrates' ironic description of the Spartans' pursuit of wisdom in Plato's *Protagoras* (342a–343b, esp. 342d) and the Plutarchan *apophthegmata* that recount angered Spartan mothers' letters to their disappointing sons (*Mor.* 241a, d–e). Nevertheless, the epigraphic evidence provided by votive offerings from the seventh century onward reveals that at least some Spartan girls acquired basic literacy. More advanced degrees of female literacy may be inferred from Aristophanes' likely reference to a female Spartan poet, Kleitagora (*Lys.* 1237; cf. Henderson 1987, *ad loc.*) and Iamblichos' list of female Spartan Pythagoreans (*Vita Pyth.* 267).⁶

Fortunately, we possess more information about Spartan girls' education in *mousikē* (music, dancing, singing, and thus poetry), especially choral dances, which played a significant role in Spartan ritual activity, particularly in connection with the cults of Helen and Artemis (Calame 1977, esp., 251–357; on Spartan cult dances in general, see Parker 1989, 150–52; Pettersson 1992, 44–56; Constantinidou 1998; see also Calame, [Chapter 7](#) in this work). Our earliest evidence comes from two fragments of Alkman's *Partheneia*, which provide details about young girls' dancing and singing in choruses that seem to have involved competition both within and between individual choruses (see Calame 1977, 1.15–29; 2, *passim*). A number of later sources refer to such maidenly dances, including Euripides' *Helen* of 412, in which the chorus

sings of Spartan maidens dancing with Helen (1465). At the conclusion of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, the Spartan ambassador likewise describes girls sporting like colts along the banks of the Eurotas, led by the maiden-goddess Helen (1305–15). Plutarch later mentions Helen's dancing with Spartan maidens in honor of Artemis Orthia (*Thes.* 31.2), and Pausanias twice refers to chorus-dances performed by Lakedaimonian maidens in honor of Artemis at Karyai (3.10.7; 4.16.9; cf. *Poll.* 4.104). Spartan girls also apparently performed the *hyporchēma*, in which chorus members sang as they danced (*Ath.* 14.631c, citing *Pind.* fr. 112 Maehler), and both danced and sang at festivals before young male spectators (*Plut. Lyk.* 14.2–4). In addition to the literary evidence, an archaic bronze Laconian-style statuette traditionally interpreted as a running girl may rather represent a dancer, given her backward stance ([Figure 19.1](#)) (British Museum 208; cf. Fitzhardinge 1980, 116, 117 fig. 148; Herfort Koch 1986, 94 and pl. 6.6; Constantinidou 1998, 24).



Figure 19.1 Laconian girl running or dancing? Archaic bronze statuette: British Museum no. 208.

Source: © The Trustees of the British Museum.

As Claude Calame has argued in his study of choruses of young women in ancient Greece, choral dances played an important role in the cycle of initiation rituals that marked the physiological, social, and institutional development of Spartan girls into wives and mothers. Spartan girls competed in choruses, each of which was bound together by age similarity and ties of companionship, trained by a professional poet, and led by a *chorēgos* selected

from among the oldest girls. In these choruses girls received training in song, dances, and cultic acts that prepared them to participate in various public rituals, festivals, and contests. More importantly, this training instilled in Spartan girls the *polis*' system of values through the medium of the poet's verses and thus prepared them to adapt to those gender roles, behaviors, and responsibilities that sustained Sparta's body politic (Calame 1977; cf. Ducat 2006, 224–6, 244–5).

Dance, however, could also provide physical and agonistic benefits to Spartan girls, as Aristophanes suggests in his depiction of the unnaturally healthy Lampito, who boasts about her ability to perform a dance in which she kicks her buttocks (*Lys.* 82). According to Pollux, this athletic feat, known as the *bibasis*, was a Laconian dance that offered prizes – likely for the most completed leaps and buttock kicks – to young men and women (Poll. 4.102; cf. Oribasius, *Coll. Med.* 6.31). While Aristophanes is clearly lampooning Spartan female exercise, he and other authors reveal that athletic events also played an important role in the education of Spartan girls (cf. Arrigoni 1985a, 65–95; Angeli–Bernardini 1988a; Scanlon 1988; Pomeroy 2002, 12–27; Ducat 2006, 228–34). Xenophon claims that the lawgiver Lykourgos instituted a regimen of physical training for women and established contests of running and strength for female competitors (*Lak. Pol.* 1.4). Plutarch later expands Lykourgos' regimen into a full athletic program that included running, wrestling, and the throwing of the discus and the javelin (*Lyk.* 14.2; *Mor.* 227d = *Apophth. Lak.*, Lykourgos no. 12), while Propertius' Spartan women engage in everything from boxing to swordplay (3.14.1–11).

The evidence, as we should expect, is not without its problems. Propertius not only portrays Spartan females as quasi-Amazonian athletes *cum* warriors but also makes this idealized image the basis of an opposition he constructs between Spartan women's sexual freedom and the social constraints on Roman women (cf. Arrigoni 1985a, 69; Ducat 2006, 228–9). Plutarch's claim concerning Spartan girls' hurling of the javelin, in turn, lacks support from classical sources (cf. Pl. *Leg.* 806b), and it is difficult to ascertain the period of Spartan education that his statements reflect. The sources that explicitly mention female wrestling are also late and may merely echo Euripides' reference to Spartan girls' licentious exercise (*Andr.* 599).⁷ However, the trials of strength that Xenophon mentions (*Lak. Pol.* 1.4) probably comprised wrestling, given Plato's inclusion of wrestling in the trials of strength that were currently popular (*Leg.* 833d). A group of archaic bronze statuettes featuring girls wearing briefs, known as *diazōmata*, may also represent Spartan female wrestlers because of their similarity to sixth-century representations of Atalanta wrestling with Peleus (Ducat 2006, 229–30; cf. Scanlon 1988, 193–6; Stewart 1997, 110, 231–2).

We have a broader range of evidence concerning Spartan girls' participation in races, even if we remain wary of Euripides' tendentious treatment of

Spartan female exercise (*Andr.* 599). Alkman's *Partheneia* make several references to members of a chorus engaging in a race (1.39ff.; 3.8–9 Campbell 1988; cf. Calame 1977, 2.67–72). The third-century BCE bucolic poet Theocritus later describes Helen and her age-mates racing along the Eurotas (*Id.* 18.22–5, cf. 39–44; cf. Calame 1977, 1.333–50; Arrigoni 1985a, 70–6). Both Pausanias (3.13.7) and the fifth-century CE Alexandrian Hesychios (s.v. *Dionysiades*) attest to female races in honor of Dionysos (cf. Calame 1977, 1.323–33; Arrigoni 1985a, 76–84). Finally, Hesychios' mention of a *dromos* for Lakedaimonian maidens (s.v. *en Drionas*) may refer to a track reserved for such races (Arrigoni 1985a, 74; Ducat 2006, 231–2). This evidence accords with the archaeological evidence provided by archaic bronze statuettes depicting running girls, including the aforementioned figurine that may represent a dancing girl.⁸ All are dressed in *chitōniskoi*, short tunics that probably correspond to the outfit worn by girls racing at the Olympian Heraia in Pausanias' time (5.16.3). This garment may have earned Spartan girls the sobriquet *phainomērides* ('thigh-flashers') from the sixth-century BCE lyric poet Ibykos (fr. 58 Campbell 1991 = Plut. *Comp. Lyk.–Num.* 3.3) and the attention of other authors, including Sophokles (fr. 788 Radt = Plut. *Comp. Lyk.–Num.* 3.4), Euripides (*Andr.* 598; *Hek.* 933–4), the author of the 'Dissoi Logoi' (DK⁶ 90 B2.9), and likely Plato (*Rep.* 452a, 457a–b; *Leg.* 833d).

According to Euripides' Peleus, Spartan girls' participation in athletic events with bared thighs and open robes produced wanton wives and immodest girls used to sharing their exercise grounds with males (*Andr.* 595–601). The ancient literary and archaeological evidence, however, presents a more complex picture of both Spartan female athletics and the semi-nudity or nudity connected with such athletic activity.⁹ Xenophon suggests that Spartan girls competed in athletic contests with one another rather than with men and claims that the physical training of females aimed to produce strong mothers of vigorous offspring (*Lak. Pol.* 1.3–4). Kritias likewise remarks on the benefits of the mother's exercise for her offspring in the opening section of his work on the Spartan *politeia*, written c.425–403 (DK⁶ 88, fr. 32). Plutarch similarly attributes female athletics to the Spartans' desire to improve the process of childbirth and the production of healthy children (*Lyk.* 14.2; *Mor.* 227d = *Apophth. Lak.*, *Lykourgos* no. 12). In addition to their eugenic aims, it seems clear that at least some of the female sporting events described by these authors – particularly the foot races mentioned above – had a ritual significance and constituted another element of the Spartan cycle of female initiation (Scanlon 1988, 197–202; Millender 1999, 367–9; Cartledge 2001c, 114; Ducat 2006, 233–4). That Spartan female athletic activity had both eugenic and ritual ends is not surprising, when we consider that Spartan cults for women focused on female beauty, health, and, most importantly, fertility (Pomeroy 2002, 105).

The semi-nudity or nudity that several sources associate with Spartan female

exercise underscores the intermingled eugenic and ritual character of such athletic activity (Millender 1999, 367–9; cf. Scanlon 1988, 189–90; Ducat 2006, 235–7, 244–5). Aristophanes’ robust Lampito seems to exemplify the eugenic benefits from exercise in the nude (*Lys.* 82: γυμνάδδομαι), and Kritias explicitly refers to female athletic nudity in praise of Spartan eugenics (DK⁶ 88, fr. 32). Plutarch’s account of the Lykourgan regimen for girls particularly highlights the ritual aspect of athletic nudity and Spartan female exercise in general. According to Plutarch, Lykourgos freed Spartan girls from softness, delicacy, and effeminacy by accustoming nude maidens to take part in processions and to dance and sing at certain festivals when the young men were present as spectators (*Lyk.* 14.2–4; cf. *Mor.* 227e = *Apophth. Lak., Lykourgos* no. 13). Plutarch defines these activities as ‘incitements toward marriage’, among which he includes Spartan maidens’ *apoduseis* (‘undressing’) and participation in athletic contests (*Lyk.* 15.1). Athletic nudity, in other words, seems to have played a role in Spartan girls’ transition to marriage and adult life.

Plutarch, granted, is a late source and the only author who suggests that Spartan girls participated in these events totally nude. Nevertheless, his account of female ritual nudity and the aforementioned ancient references to Spartan female semi-nudity accord with the series of archaic bronze handles and freestanding figurines discussed above that depict both naked girls and girls wearing *chitōniskoi* or *diazōmata*. The identification, function, and ritual context of these female statuettes remain debated. However, their generally underdeveloped physiques and various accoutrements suggest that they represent girls and young women involved in the cycle of initiation rites marking the progression toward marriage, like the Spartan females participating in the processions, dances, and athletic contests described by Plutarch and others (Scanlon 1988, 191–202; Stewart 1997, 108–16).

Through their inclusion of cultic nudity and athleticism, Spartan female rites of passage paralleled a number of initiation ceremonies observed in other parts of Greece, such as the Athenian celebration of the Brauronian Arkteia or ‘Bear Festival’ (Millender 1999, 368–9). Spartan female prenuptial rites, however, took place in front of the whole community and probably included both prepubescent and post-pubescent girls, since Spartan girls married relatively late, around eighteen to twenty years of age (cf. *Plut. Lyk.* 15.3; *Mor.* 228a = *Apophth. Lak., Lykourgos* no. 16; *Pl. Rep.* 460e; *Leg.* 785b, 833d, along with Cartledge 2001c, 116; Pomeroy 2002, 44, 56).¹⁰ In Sparta, more importantly, athletics and the nudity that was at once cultic and athletic in nature seem to have been central elements of a state-organized system of education and initiation rites for Spartan girls (on this system of female initiation, see Calame 1977; cf. the caveats of Cartledge 2001c, 215 n. 42; Ducat, 2006, 243–5). This comprehensive process of socialization roughly corresponded to the renowned upbringing of Spartan boys and was intricately

bound up with the Spartans' practice of eugenics. Like its male counterpart, the female educational system probably lasted from the archaic period to the middle of the third century BCE at the latest, when the Spartans abandoned the male public upbringing (cf. Kennell 1995, 11–14).

It seems probable that the Spartans' emphasis on the cultivation of vigorous mothers of Spartiate warriors and their complex cycle of girls' initiation ceremonies made athletics a more common feature of female life in Sparta than in Athens and other Greek *poleis*. The Spartans' enculturation of girls also produced physically fit Spartan females accustomed to outdoor public activity and interaction with males. The Spartans' elaborate initiatory system, moreover, gave young females a prominent role in the *polis*' cults and festivals, in which they at once reified the values acquired through their education, demonstrated to the community the efficacy of their education, and began to assume those roles that they would later play as wives and mothers of citizens (cf. Jeanmaire 1939, [chapter 7](#); Brelich 1969, 113–207; Calame 1977, 1.251–357). If we are to believe Plutarch's accounts of those public events at which both girls and boys were present (*Lyk.* 14.2–4, 15.1; cf. *Mor.* 227e = *Apophth. Lak.*, *Lykourgos* no. 13), Spartan girls did not simply parade, dance, sing, and compete in athletic contests before young male spectators. They also participated in the civic instruction of young Spartan males and thus began their life-long responsibility for evaluating the behavior of their menfolk and safeguarding the system of values that guided male and female conduct (*Lyk.* 14.3; cf. Redfield 1977/8, 146; Ducat 1998; 2006, 224–7):

There they sometimes even appropriately criticized boys who had misbehaved by hurling jibes at each one, and, in turn, sang praises they had composed to those worthy of them, and thus excited in the young men great ambition and zeal. Indeed, the one who had been praised for his manly virtue and had become renowned among the girls went off exalted by their praise, while the barbs of their jibes and ridicule were no less sharp than those of serious admonitions, since the kings and the *gerontes* (elders) attended the spectacle along with the rest of the citizens.

Nevertheless, Spartan female athletics and the nudity that served both athletic and cultic ends, like the larger system of female education and initiation rituals, ultimately served the interests of the male-dominated community and its promotion of marriage and *teknopoia*, literally, 'the manufacture of children', the female's primary function (Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 1.4; cf. Napolitano 1985).

19.3 Marital and Sexual *Mores*

While Spartan girls' education was unusual in its public nature and promotion

of physical exercise, their experience of marriage appears to have deviated little from that of their counterparts in other Greek *poleis*. Indeed, the extant sources suggest that Spartan females enjoyed no more independence in these matters than Athenian brides (MacDowell 1986, 77–82; Millender 1999, 363–4; Cartledge 2001c, 121–3; Hodkinson 2004, 113–17; *contra* Pomeroy 2002, 39). Herodotos suggests that the responsibility for betrothal, in normal circumstances, belonged to the Spartan father (6.57.4, 71.2; cf. Eur. *Andr.* 987–8). Aristotle offers further support for the existence in Sparta of the *kyrieia*, the legal guardianship of a female by her nearest male relation, usually her father or his closest male heir before her marriage and then her husband (*Pol.* 1270a26–9; cf. Hodkinson 2004, 105–6, 114, 116–17). According to Aristotle, if the father did not betroth his heiress, that right fell to the *klēronomos*, most probably her male next-of-kin.

The only piece of evidence that argues against this type of marital procedure occurs in Herodotos’ account of King Damaratos’ *harpagē* (‘seizure’) of Perkalos, the intended bride of his relative (and later royal successor), Leotychidas, before the latter had consummated his marriage (6.65.2). It makes better sense, however, to view Damaratos’ rape of his kinsman’s bride as an aberrant example of a ‘marriage by capture’ (cf. Plut. *Lyk.* 15.3), a symbolic kidnapping of the bride by the groom which likely occurred after the bride’s *kyrios* (guardian) and the bridegroom had arranged the marriage. Whatever the case may be, the Spartan female appears to have had little say in either stage of the marital process. Herodotos further points to male control over matrimonial matters in his accounts of the marriages contracted by the Agiad king Anaxandridas II (c.550–c.520) (5.39–40) and the Eurypontid king Ariston (c.550–c.515) (6.61–63.1).

Plutarch’s description of the stark ritual of the wedding night suggests that the marriage ceremony likewise was a male-centered affair, given its focus on the groom’s needs (*Lyk.* 15.3–4; cf. Lupi 2000, 71–5). After the *harpagē* of the bride, a female attendant cut off the bride’s hair close to her head, dressed her in a man’s cloak and sandals, and laid her down on a pallet on the floor, where she remained alone in the dark while her groom dined with his mess-mates. The groom later slipped into this room, where he loosened the bride’s *zōnē* (girdle) and carried her to the marriage bed. After spending a short amount of time with his bride, the new groom returned to his usual quarters, which he shared with the other young men.

Certain aspects of this ceremony had – albeit less extreme – parallels in the wedding rituals practiced in other *poleis*, such as Athens. The theme of abduction, for example, underlies the Athenian groom’s lifting of the bride onto a chariot at the start of the wedding procession and later grasping of his wife by the wrist as he conducted her around the hearth. Athenian brides, moreover, cut and consecrated their hair to a goddess such as Artemis or Athena as part of their purification before marriage (cf. Blundell 1995, 122–

3). In Sparta, however, the cropping of the bride's hair and transvestism likely aimed to transform her temporarily into an adolescent Spartan boy – a less threatening figure to the groom, who probably had made his own transition to adulthood via a close emotional and sexual relationship with an older male and was now in the position to sexually initiate other boys into Spartan society (cf. Cartledge 2001b; Ducat 2006, esp. 91–3, 164–9, 196–201).

Life after marriage continued to be dictated by both the male's and the larger *polis*' needs. Until the age of thirty, the Spartan husband lived in the barracks with other males, only occasionally making furtive visits to his wife under cover of darkness (Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 1.5; Plut. *Lyk.* 15.4; *Mor.* 228a = *Apophth. Lak., Lykourgos* nos. 17–18). Although we might not credit Plutarch's claim that some of these husbands fathered children before seeing their wives in daylight (*Lyk.* 15.5), he may be referring to a type of 'trial marriage' that became official only after the production of offspring (Cartledge 2001c, 123; cf. Lupi 2000, 76ff.). Divorce, too, appears to have been under male control, as Herodotos suggests in his accounts of both the Spartan authorities' attempt to force King Anaxandridas II to divorce his niece because of her infertility (5.39–40) and King Ariston's acquisition of his third wife (6.61–63.1).

Despite the evidence provided by such accounts, scholars argue that Spartan women enjoyed an unusual degree of sexual freedom, often on the basis of ancient descriptions of wife-sharing (see, esp., Pomeroy 1975, 37; 2002, 37–41, 44–5, 160). According to Xenophon, the Spartan lawgiver Lykourgos instituted various forms of wife-sharing, ostensibly in order to maximize the child-bearing potential of healthy, young Spartiate women (*Lak. Pol.* 1.7–8). One type made it legal for an elderly husband to introduce into his house a younger man, whose physique and character he admired, for the sake of producing children with his wife. Another allowed the man who did not wish to marry but desired children to produce children with another man's wife, provided that he had previously gained the husband's permission. Xenophon claims that Lykourgos sanctioned many similar arrangements, because the wives wanted to take charge of two households, and the husbands desired to produce for their sons' brothers who would share in the family and its influence but have no claims on the family's wealth (*Lak. Pol.* 1.9).

These arrangements may have included two practices later mentioned by the second-century BCE historian Polybios (12.6b.8): first, the sharing of one woman by three, four, or even more brothers and the treatment of resulting offspring as the common property of all and, second, the right of a Spartan male who had produced a sufficient number of children to pass his wife on to a friend. Plutarch, finally, claims that Lykourgos attempted to free the Spartans from jealousy and possessiveness in their sexual relations by making it honorable for all worthy men to share in the production of offspring (*Lyk.* 15.6; cf. *Comp. Lyk-Num.* 3.1). He then describes, with slight variations, the two wife-sharing schemes mentioned by Xenophon (*Lyk.* 15.7; cf. *Comp. Lyk-*

A number of scholars have identified these customs as a response to *oliganthrōpia*, i.e. the Spartans' shrinking pool of manpower, in the late fifth century (Mossé 1991, 143; Cartledge 2002, 310–11; on Spartan *oliganthrōpia*, see, esp., Arist. *Pol.* 1270a29–32, along with Figueira 1986; Cartledge 2002, 307–18). Spartan wife-sharing may thus parallel a late-fifth-century Athenian decree that addressed a manpower shortage by allowing citizens to marry one woman and to breed legitimate children with another (Dem. 23.53; Gell. 15.20.6; Ath. 13.556a–b; Diog. Laert. 2.26). Stephen Hodkinson, however, has classed this practice along with other economically-driven marital customs (discussed below) that aimed at both the limitation of legitimate children and the preservation of family wealth and status (2000, 406–9; 2004, 115–16).

Whether these wife-sharing arrangements aimed at population expansion or control, they, like the other marital customs discussed above, not only placed men in control of the exchange of women between households but also provide further support for the existence of the *kyrieia* (cf. Millender 1999, 366; Cartledge 2001c, 124, 219 nn. 112, 117). Xenophon's (*Lak. Pol.* 1.8) and Plutarch's (*Lyk.* 15.7; cf. *Mor.* 242b) assertions, that permission had to be sought from the husbands of the females involved, particularly highlight male authority over these marital practices, despite modern scholarly claims to the contrary (cf. Kunstler 1987, 99; Pomeroy 2002, 39–40, 44–5, 160; 2004, 207, 211). Both accounts indeed underline the Spartan wife's role as her husband's possession and her primary importance as a producer of children for a male-dominated society. As we have seen above, Xenophon alone ascribes agency to the shared Spartan wife in his claim that the women involved were motivated by their desire to gain possession of two households (*Lak. Pol.* 1.9). Xenophon's statement, however, reveals less about Spartan female sexual freedom than about Spartan women's economic influence and interests, just as it focuses on the Spartan male's concern about the paternal inheritance (cf. Ducat 1998, 396; Hodkinson 2004, 120).

19.4 Land Ownership, Wealth, and Economic Power

Spartan women, in fact, appear to have exercised a greater degree of economic power than their Athenian counterparts. Herodotos provides the earliest evidence concerning Spartan female economic activity in his discussion of the Spartan kings' jurisdiction over the allocation of every unmarried *patrouchos* not betrothed by her father (6.57.4). This term probably

corresponds to the *patroiochos* of the nearly contemporaneous Gortynian law code. It denotes a daughter with no father or brother from the same father (*Gortyn Code* 8.40–2) who inherited her father’s estate, controlled her patrimony, and had to relinquish a portion of it to the next-of-kin she was expected to marry only in the event that she refused him (*Gortyn Code* 7.35–8.12).¹¹ The Gortynian heiress’s control over her property conforms to other provisions in the code which show that Gortynian women could own and deal with property in their own right and bequeath property to their children. Gortynian daughters, moreover, inherited a share of the family estate even in the presence of sons. The paucity of evidence for the dowry at Gortyn, in addition, suggests that the portion of the family estate which a Gortynian daughter received as a marriage settlement functioned as a form of pre-mortem inheritance.

Herodotos stresses the Spartan *patrouchos*’ lack of independence in marital matters and does not state whether she legally controlled her patrimony like her Cretan namesake. However, several sources suggest that Spartiate females possessed and managed property in their own right (see, esp., Hodkinson 2004; *contra* Ducat 1998, 393). Beneath its hostile treatment of Spartan women, Euripides’ *Andromache* provides an important kernel of information concerning the economic position of Spartan women in its characterization of Hermione as a woman who maintained control over the property she had received as a marriage-settlement from her father, Menelaos (*Andr.* 147–53, 211, 873–4, 940). Euripides’ references to Spartan female property-holding receive support from the relatively costly bronze bells discovered on the Spartan acropolis which suggest that some fifth-century Spartan women were expending significant sums on specially commissioned votives at the sanctuary of Athena Chalkioikos (Hodkinson 2000, 293; 2004, 110–11; cf. Villing 2002, 224).

In the following century, Kyniska, the sister of the Eurypontid king Agesilaos II (400–360), possessed sufficient land and financial resources to maintain the horses with which she won two victories in the Olympic four-horse chariot race, probably in 396 and 392.¹² Other Spartan women subsequently competed in Olympic chariot races, including a certain Euryleonis who won the two-horse chariot race in 368 (Paus. 3.8.1, 17.6; Moretti 1957, no. 418). Aristotle later criticizes Spartiate females’ ownership of approximately two-fifths of the land, which he holds partly responsible for Sparta’s decline as a military power and attributes to both the high number of heiresses and the practice of giving large dowries (*Pol.* 1270a11–34). Finally, we should consider Plutarch’s accounts of wealthy women in mid-third-century Sparta in his biographies of the Eurypontid Agis IV (c.244–241) and the Agiad Kleomenes III (c.235–222). Plutarch, for example, describes Agis IV’s mother, Agesistrata, and grandmother, Archidamia, as ‘the wealthiest of the Lakedaimonians’ (*Agis* 4.1; cf. 6.7–7.4, 9.6, 18.8). He also claims that the

majority of landed wealth in Sparta was in the hands of such women (*Agis* 7.5).

Although Euripides describes Hermione's independent wealth in terms that usually refer to a dowry (*Andr.* 2, 153, 873: *hednon*; 1282: *phernē*), and Aristotle emphasizes the size of dowries (*Pol.* 1270a25: *proikas*), the powerful position of women in Spartan land tenure in Aristotle's day suggests that Spartiate daughters did not simply receive voluntary bridal gifts of extraordinary proportions. It is more likely that they, similar to Gortynian daughters, inherited part of the family estate in the form of a marriage-settlement. Indeed, as studies of Spartan land ownership and inheritance have shown, Spartan females from at least the mid-sixth century possessed rights of inheritance enjoyed by their counterparts in fifth-century Gortyn. Under this system of universal female inheritance, Spartan daughters inherited even in the presence of male siblings, their portion being half that of a son (see, esp., Hodkinson 2000, 94–103, 400–416; 2004; cf. Cartledge 2001c, 119–20).

Spartan women's ability to inherit, possess, and use wealth in their own right had important implications for their position in Sparta (cf. Hodkinson 2004). The Spartiate male's status and privileges as a citizen rested upon his mess dues and ultimately his possession of sufficient agriculturally-productive property to make these contributions. Consequently, the Spartan female's ownership of property made her a valuable asset in the marriage market and thus accounts for the Spartan family's formal control over female marriage discussed above. By means of economically advantageous marriages, families could maintain or increase their holdings and ensure their sons' inheritance of citizen status. The acquisition and preservation of wealth would also have safeguarded such families' preeminent position and influence in the Spartan community (on wealth as a determinant of status, see Hodkinson 1989, 95–100; 1993). The Spartans' practice of universal female inheritance even prompted members of the Spartan royal houses to concentrate property through close-kin marriages, such as the unions between the Agiad Anaxandridas II and his niece (Hdt. 5.39–42), between the Agiad Leonidas I and his half-niece, Gorgo (Hdt. 7.205.1), and between a historical Lampito, daughter of the Eurypontid king Leotyichidas II (c.491–c.469), and her half-nephew, the future king Archidamos II (c.469–428/7) (Hdt. 6.71.2).¹³ Spartan women's ability to inherit also probably accounts for the various wife-sharing arrangements discussed above, which likewise helped to reduce families' division of their estates (cf. Hodkinson 2000, 406–9; 2004, 115–16).

Spartan women's relative economic independence also likely gave them a certain degree of leverage in familial matters. Evidence from fifth- and fourth-century Athenian sources reveals that rich heiresses and well-dowered Athenian women were capable of exercising influence over the economic affairs of their families, despite their ostensible lack of control over their property (cf., e.g., *Lys.* 32.11–18; *Dem.* 41; see Foxhall 1989). It is probable

that contemporary Spartan women, given their relative economic independence, demonstrated this type of influence with greater frequency and efficacy (Hodkinson 2004, 120). Women involved in the polyandrous marriages described by Polybios (12.6b.8) probably enjoyed particular independence and power in their households. Such women presumably possessed a higher socio-economic standing than their male partners, and the status of the sons of such marriages would have depended on their inheritance of their mothers' property (Hodkinson 2004, 120–1).

19.5 Gynecocracy?

Did Spartan women's control over property, however, endow them with an unusual degree of power both in their individual households and in the *polis* as a whole, as Aristotle implies in his lengthy diatribe against their license, wealth, and influence (*Pol.* 1269b23–5, 31–4; cf. Powell 1999, 408–13; 2004, 139–42)? In a similar vein, Plutarch claims that Agis IV's mother, Agesistrata, attempted to win over other women to her son's cause, because 'Spartan men were always subject to their womenfolk and allowed them to meddle in public affairs to a greater extent than the men themselves were allowed to meddle in domestic concerns' (*Agis* 7.4). According to Plutarch, the majority of these women opposed Agis' reforms for fear of losing not only the luxury to which they had become accustomed but even more the honor and influence they enjoyed as a consequence of their wealth (*Agis* 7.6). Urging the other Spartan dyarch, the Agiad Leonidas II (c.256–c.243, c.241–235), to oppose Agis' reforms, they played a decisive role in both the failure of the young king's reforms and his death (*Agis* 7.7).

Aristotle's and Plutarch's assessments of female political power applied only to wealthy women and thus do not provide a picture of the female Spartan population as a whole (cf. Cartledge 2001c, 126). Nevertheless, they reflect the growing importance of wealth as a determinant of female political influence in the fourth and third centuries, as the decline of the Spartan citizen body concentrated more and more property in the hands of women (cf. Powell 1999, 411–12; Hodkinson 2004, esp. 121–3; Millender 2009, 30–1). *Oliganthrōpia* had long plagued Sparta and had become acute by Aristotle's time, when the total number of adult male Spartan citizens had fallen well below a thousand (*Pol.* 1270a29–32). Sparta's shrinking citizen body exacerbated the impact that war casualties had on citizen numbers and proportionally increased both the number of propertied widows who had fewer opportunities to remarry and the size of inheritances for women (Hodkinson 2004, 121). The further concentration of land in the hands of a

few and Spartan women's concomitant possession of approximately two-fifths of Spartan territory, in turn, must have contributed to the increasing influence of women in Sparta, as Aristotle suggests (*Pol.* 1270a15–34). After his time, Sparta continued to transform into a plutocratic *polis* of approximately seven hundred Spartiates, of which roughly one hundred monopolized the landed wealth (Plut. *Agis* 5.6). This demographic crisis would have further shifted the balance of power in favor of Spartan women, as they came to possess an absolute majority of land by 244 (Plut. *Agis* 7.5).

Wealth was thus a key element of Spartan female political activity.¹⁴ Scholars have also located the roots of female political power in Spartan women's control over the production of citizens (Paradiso 1993, 120–1; Ducat 1998, 402). Others have argued that the Spartan husband's continued absence from the household empowered the Spartan wife by allowing her to exercise full control over the management of family estates and by thus making her responsible for securing her male relations' social and political status (Kunstler 1987; Zweig 1993; Dettenhofer 1993; 1994a; cf. Thommen 1999, 144–6). When the Spartiate male was not away on one of the Lakedaimonians' frequent campaigns, he spent his days hunting, exercising, training for warfare, and performing other compulsory duties as a citizen and as a soldier. He also took his meals at the common messes and lived in barracks with other males until the age of thirty (Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 1.5; Plut. *Lyk.* 15.4–5; *Mor.* 228a = *Apophth. Lak.*, *Lykourgos* nos. 17–18). The average Spartiate husband thus probably spent less time at home than other Greek males; and his public obligations, together with the Spartan female's comparatively late age of marriage, may have helped to enhance female authority in the household (Millender 1999, 372–3; Hodkinson 2000, 438–9; 2004, 119). Nevertheless, the Spartan male must have taken an interest in the economic health of his *oikos*, on which depended his retention of citizenship, his status within the community, and the future of his descendants (Millender 1999, 372; cf. Thommen 1999, 145).

While a number of factors helped to shift the balance of power in Spartan gender relations in individual *oikoi* and the *polis* as a whole, Sparta's unique hereditary dyarchy played a particularly significant role in the creation of Lakedaimon's politically influential women (cf. Millender 2009; forthcoming c). Evidence concerning the hereditary Agiad and Eurypontid dynasties suggests that they attempted to maintain and increase their political and economic power at the expense of one another as well as of other elite Spartiate families by means of marriage, inheritance, and intra-familial political patronage. These dynastic politics enabled female members of the royal families, by virtue of their wealth and birth, to acquire political and economic influence. This influence was essentially passive in nature but certain Spartan princesses and queens were able to translate it into active interference in the political realm.

According to Herodotos, the Agiad Gorgo was just such a politically active figure (Millender 2009, 15–18; cf. Paradiso 1993). We should, of course, approach Herodotos' treatment of Spartan royal women with caution, given his conceptual association of the Spartan dyarchy with autocracy throughout the *Histories* (Millender 2002; 2009, 3–5, 7–8). Indeed, Herodotos' construction of Spartan 'despotism' shapes his depictions of the female members of the Spartan royal houses, which parallel his representations of the powerful female members of dynastic courts (Millender 1999, 357; 2002, 13–14; 2009, 7–8). For example, his account of the young Gorgo's role as wise advisor to her father (5.51.2–3) links Gorgo with a number of females in the *Histories* who perform a similar function in the courts of Greek and non-Greek dynasts, such as the daughter of the Greek tyrant Polykrates (3.124; cf. Millender 1999, 357; 2009, 7–8). While it is also doubtful that Gorgo gave her father advice on political matters at the age of eight (Hdt. 5.51.2–3), her privileged status as the daughter and wife of Spartan kings may have allowed her to wield an informal kind of political influence. More importantly, her position as the only child and heir of her powerful father, Kleomenes I (cf. Hdt. 5.48, 51.1), may have provided her with extra leverage in the 'court' of her husband, Leonidas I, and may account for her involvement in decoding Damaratos' message (Hdt. 7.239.4).

Herodotos points to the economic and dynastic roots of Gorgo's influence when he mentions Leonidas I's marriage to Gorgo as one of the factors behind his succession to the throne in 490 instead of his brother Kleombrotos (7.205.1; cf. Paradiso 1993, 114). Gorgo's inheritance of the land and other wealth possessed by her mother and affluent father would have made her a valuable commodity on the royal marriage exchange, in which the Agiads and Eurypontids pursued close-kin unions to concentrate royal property and thus improve both their land-holdings and status, as we have seen above (cf. Hodkinson 1986, 394; 2000, 95, 410–11). Gorgo's union with her half-uncle, Leonidas, may also have aided his accession to the Agiad throne by helping to legitimize his connection to the previous king, his half-brother Kleomenes I, and by strengthening his blood bond to their father, Anaxandridas II (Millender 2009, 17).

In addition to his accounts of Gorgo, Herodotos notes various Spartan queens' effect on dynastic succession through their beauty (6.61–2), suspicions concerning the paternity of their offspring (6.63, 65.3), their production of multiple heirs (6.52.2–7), or, in other cases, by their inability to produce an heir (5.39–42.2; 6.61.1–2). These accounts suggest that female members of the royal houses had opportunities to exercise at least passive political influence, given the hereditary nature of Spartan kingship and the key roles that females necessarily played in marital alliances and reproduction. Whether or not these other Spartan royal women who featured in Herodotos' *Histories* were able to convert such dynastic, economic, and personal sway into real

political influence over the dyarchs is another matter.

Xenophon and Plutarch provide a more tangible glimpse of Spartan female political influence in their accounts of Agesilaos II's sister, Kyniska (Millender 2009, 23–6; forthcoming c). Kyniska employed her wealth not only to finance her aforementioned equestrian victories at Olympia in the 390s but also to dedicate two elaborate victory monuments at Olympia (*IvO* 160 and 634; Paus. 5.12.5; 6.1.6; cf. Cartledge 1987, 150; Serwint 1987, 431–3; Hodkinson 2000, 321–3; 2004, 112). The stone pedestal of the first and more impressive of these dedications – a set of bronze statues of Kyniska, her charioteer, her chariot, and its team of horses – bore an epigram that Kyniska commissioned to celebrate both her unique victory and her royal pedigree (*IG* V.1.1564a; cf. *Anth. Pal.* 13.16; Ebert 1972 n. 33; Paus. 3.8.2; 6.1.6):

My father and brothers are kings of Sparta.

I, Kyniska, victorious with a chariot of swift-footed horses,

set up this statue. And I declare myself the only woman

in all Hellas to have taken this crown.

According to Xenophon (*Ages.* 9.6) and Plutarch (*Ages.* 20.1; cf. *Mor.* 212b = *Apophth. Lak.*, *Agesilaos* no. 49), Agesilaos encouraged Kyniska, who was then probably in her forties, to breed chariot horses and to enter them in the four-horse chariot race at Olympia. Both authors claim that Agesilaos sought to discredit success in equestrian competitions by demonstrating that wealth, rather than manliness and personal merit, determined victory in these events. Agesilaos thus appears to have involved his sister in public affairs to increase his own political and social status – and by extension that of the Eurypontid house – at the expense of elite Spartiates, who saw in equestrian competition an indirect route to political power (cf. Hodkinson 1989, 99; 2000, 327–8).

If, however, Kyniska competed at Olympia in 396 and 392, the timing and setting of her victories suggest that Agesilaos hoped to achieve a number of goals through his sister's equestrian activities. Her victories may have supported Agesilaos' touted panhellenist political agenda at two crucial junctures in the Spartans' involvement in the East (cf. Cartledge 1987, 150; Shipley 1997, 247–8). A possible victory in the late summer of 396 would have coincided with Agesilaos' panhellenic crusade against the Persians and would have bolstered Agesilaos' attempt to portray himself as a second Agamemnon through his – albeit unsuccessful – pre-embarkation sacrifice at Aulis (Xen. *Hell.* 3.4.3–4; 3.5.5; 7.1.34; Plut. *Ages.* 6.4–6). Kyniska's Olympic victory could only have reinforced her brother's self-portrait as the quintessential panhellenist favored by the gods and would have endowed both his expedition and his command with heroic stature (cf. Hodkinson 2000, 325).

A second victory in the late summer of 392 would have offered Agesilaos and the Lakedaimonians something of a respite after a series of political and military setbacks, including the recent massacre of pro-Spartan oligarchs at a Corinthian festival in the spring of 392 and Corinth's ensuing formation of a political union with Argos (Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.1–6; Diod. 14.86.1, 92.1). This series of reversals and the Spartans' consequent need to reassert their hegemony in mainland Greece forced them to abandon their unsuccessful anti-Persian policy in the summer and autumn of 392 (Xen. *Hell.* 4.8.12–16). Given the troubled state of the Spartans' reputation among their fellow Greeks, particularly their allies and the Greeks of Western Asia, Kyniska's participation in the Olympic games in 392 and the victory of her *quadriga* would have served two interconnected purposes. Agesilaos likely realized the continuous appeal of the ideal – if not the reality – of panhellenic solidarity among his fellow Greeks, as the Sicilian sophist and orator Gorgias made clear in his famous oration, not coincidentally, at those same Olympic games (Cartledge 1987, 150; cf. 61, 365). Kyniska's possible victory in 392, therefore, could have relayed the Spartans' and particularly Agesilaos II's continued support of Hellenic freedom at a time when the Spartans had to renounce their much-vaunted panhellenic aims. A second Olympic victory, moreover, would have enhanced the status of Agesilaos and the rest of the Eurypontid house – commemorated in the first line of Kyniska's victory epigram – in the eyes of their fellow Greeks by casting them as favored by the gods and thus deserving of their hegemony.

The hero-cult that the Spartans awarded to Kyniska after her death, in turn, may provide evidence of Agesilaos' employment of his sister to support his political aspirations among his fellow Spartiates (cf. Millender forthcoming a).¹⁵ According to Pausanias, Kyniska's unprecedented hero-shrine was located in the center of Sparta at the Platanistas (3.15.1). More significantly, the shrine was strategically situated close to three sites associated with the enculturation of Spartan girls: the *dromos*, the site of athletic contests among young girls; the sanctuary of Helen, whose cult practices, including races, served to initiate Spartan girls into the community as adult women; and the tomb of Alkman, whose *Partheneia* may refer to one of these ritual races (cf. Ducat 1999, 168; Hodkinson 2004, 112). Kyniska's shrine would have immortalized among the Lakedaimonians not only the Spartan princess and her own *aretē* but also the Eurypontid dynasty to which she belonged and in whose service she achieved such success. Its location, more importantly, would have linked the princess and her family with the semi-divine Helen and, by extension, the first 'royal family' of Sparta. Agesilaos' interest in forging such a link with Helen and Menelaos may also account for the part of a small Doric capital and abacus inscribed with Kyniska's name that probably supported a dedication to Helen and was discovered at the Menelaion, the sanctuary of Menelaos and Helen located on a bluff overlooking the Eurotas to the east of Sparta (*IG* V.1.235).¹⁶ Agesilaos' support for both the

construction of the shrine and the dedication at the Menelaion would suggest that he repeatedly exploited Kyniska's reflected glory and royal lineage to legitimize and strengthen his political position.

The ancient evidence on Agesilaos' relationship with Kyniska is, admittedly, limited and problematic. While Xenophon (*Ages.* 9.6) and Plutarch (*Ages.* 20.1; cf. *Mor.* 212b = *Apophth. Lak.*, *Agesilaos* no. 49) emphasize Agesilaos' role as the instigator of his sister's equestrian pursuits, their accounts are lodged in eulogistic treatments of the Spartan king. The second-century CE periegetic writer Pausanias alone claims that Kyniska was ambitious to win at the Olympic games (3.8.1). Pausanias, however, viewed Kyniska's victories from the perspective of the imperial Roman sporting world, in which assertive and wealthy women took advantage of greater opportunities for female sport (Kyle 2003, 186). The archaeological and epigraphic sources for Kyniska, in turn, provide no definitive evidence for either her deference to Agesilaos' agenda or her own aspirations. Scholars, accordingly, have disagreed regarding the extent of Kyniska's initiative (see, e.g., Cartledge 1987, 150; Ducat 1998, 393–4; Pomeroy 2002, 21, 22 n. 79; Kyle 2003). Whatever the case may be, it seems probable that Agesilaos' predominant status in Sparta and tendency to delegate power to his relations allowed Kyniska to play a public role in support of his domestic and foreign policies (Millender 2009, 26; forthcoming c).

By exploiting Kyniska's wealth and symbolic value as a member of the Eurypontid house, Agesilaos II, moreover, may have laid the groundwork for the more direct political influence wielded in the third century by female members of the royal houses, such as Agis IV's mother, Agesistrata (Millender 2009, 28–36; forthcoming c). In his biography of Agis IV, Plutarch suggests that Agis sought to persuade Agesistrata to support his reforms, because her numerous clients, friends, and debtors endowed her with great influence in Sparta and allowed her to play an important role in public affairs (*Agis* 6.7). Even more necessary was Agesistrata's wealth, which would advance her son's ambition, glory, and program of reform (*Agis* 7.2–3). Agesistrata and Agis' grandmother, Archidamia, used their wealth and social connections to aid Agis, despite the negative impact that his proposed reforms would have had on their personal wealth and influence (*Agis* 9.6; cf. 7.6). As Plutarch explains, these queens were the only wealthy women in Sparta who were persuaded to make such sacrifices (*Agis* 7.4–7), probably because they stood to benefit from the increased power of the Eurypontid house that would result from both the reforms and a Spartan renaissance. Plutarch, in fact, suggests that Agesistrata and Archidamia supported Agis' ambitions rather than his reforms and only came on board when they realized that such changes could help to strengthen the prestige of Spartan royal power (*Agis* 7.1–4).

As Plutarch makes clear, several women played equally important roles in

Kleomenes III's court, beginning with Agiatis, the wealthy widow of Agis IV. After the Agiad Leonidas II forced her into an illegal marriage with his under-age son, the future Kleomenes III (*Kleom.* 1.1–2), Agiatis supposedly kindled Kleomenes' interest in reviving Agis' reforms (*Kleom.* 1.3). Kratesikleia, Kleomenes III's mother, later materially assisted her son (*Kleom.* 6.2), made a political marriage to further his plans (*Kleom.* 6.2), and even went as a hostage to Egypt to help him gain Ptolemy III's financial support (*Kleom.* 22.4–5).

Plutarch's depictions of these politically influential royal women must, of course, be approached with caution. The much more explicit and active political power wielded by third-century royal women, however, is far from surprising, when we consider both the continuing concentration of landed property in the hands of women (cf. Plut. *Agis* 7.5) and the increasingly autocratic character of the Spartan dyarchy, as it became adapted to a political culture shaped by Macedonian kingship (Millender 2009, 31–4; forthcoming c; see my [Chapter 17](#) on the Spartan dyarchy in this volume). The impact that the increasingly autocratic nature of Spartan kingship in this period had on the female members of the royal houses was inevitable, given the link between royal power and female influence that we have seen above in the courts of Kleomenes I, Leonidas I, and Agesilaos II – a link subsequently forged in the Hellenistic courts with which the Spartan royal families came into contact throughout much of the third century BCE. As James Roy has argued, 'the highly personal nature of the Hellenistic king's power meant that those in personal contact with him could hope to affect political decisions by exercising informal influence over him in private, and some queens and other royal women did so' (1998, 119). Hellenistic Sparta, it would seem, was no exception to this rule. As ambitious kings monopolized political power, influence over public affairs inevitably spread to those nearest and dearest to them, including the female members of their families. The involvement of female relatives in affairs of state became particularly necessary for the revolutionary kings Agis IV and Kleomenes III, who needed their womenfolk's wealth and consequent social power to effect their reforms and to bolster their exceptional positions (cf. Plut. *Agis* 6.7, 7.2–3; *Kleom.* 6.2; see Powell 1999; Hodkinson 2004, 124–5; Millender 2009, 34–5).

The Spartan royal families' close ties with the Ptolemies likely contributed to this extension of political influence. The Ptolemaic dynasty, in fact, may have provided models of royal female political power which influenced the roles that female members of the Spartan royal houses played in public affairs during this period. Claude Mossé (1991, 146) has noted, for example, the Ptolemaic flavor of the citation of both a Spartan queen and king in a third-century Delphic inscription awarding proxeny to Areus – either the Agiad King Areus I (309/8–265) or his grandson, Areus II (c.260–c.256) – hailed as 'son of King Akrotatos and Queen Chilonis' (*SIG* III³ 430). Agis IV's and

Kleomenes III's decisions to involve their wealthy female relations in affairs of state, in addition, may have been fostered by the examples set by the reign of Ptolemy II and his sister-wife Arsinoe II and by the subsequent reign of Ptolemy III and Berenike II (Millender 2009, 35–40; forthcoming c; on the powers of these Hellenistic queens, see Savalli-Lestrade 1994; Roy 1998; Hazzard 2000).

19.6 Conclusions

As this overview of the evidence reveals, Spartan women's lives did not significantly differ from those of their Athenian counterparts in terms of their fundamental roles and obligations as daughters, wives, and mothers (cf. Thommen 1999, 146–7; Cartledge 2001c; Millender 1999). Granted, the state-organized system of education and initiation rites for Spartan girls promoted female athletic activity and gave girls a prominent place in the *polis*' cults and festivals. Nevertheless, the eugenic aim of such exercise and of the educational system as a whole again underscores the Spartan female's reproductive value. The *polis*' cults and festivals, moreover, served as the medium through which Spartan girls at once imbibed and validated the values of their male-dominated community and also assumed the roles they would later play as wives and mothers. After this period of socialization, they entered marriage under the direction of their fathers or closest male relatives and devoted their lives to procreation and the supervision of their households. While their comparatively late age of marriage may have placed them more on a par with their husbands, it ultimately served a eugenic purpose; and the less tendentious accounts of Spartan marital practices stress male dominance in conjugal relationships. At times in Spartan history, their husbands may have involved them in wife-sharing schemes or polyandrous marital arrangements, but these customs ultimately reveal less about Spartan women's sexual independence and power than about their primary value as child-bearers and owners of property (cf. Cartledge 2001c, 124–5; Hodkinson 2004, 127).

As we have seen, however, the Lakedaimonians' economic and political structures provided opportunities for women – especially those of the elite and royal families – to enjoy exceptional degrees of economic independence and political power, especially in the third century BCE. Spartan women's legal ownership of property and their important place in the Agiad and Eurypontid dynasties may explain the fascination they roused in authors such as Euripides and Aristotle. These aspects of the Spartan female experience also may have provided the basis for the belief in a Spartan gynecocracy that such Athenian-based authors fanned into flame as they constructed Spartan gender *mores* via the sexual expectations and values which informed Athenian conceptions of

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NOTES

1 All translations are my own unless noted otherwise.

2 On Alkman's origin, which remains disputed, see Campbell 1988, T 1–9.

3 On Plutarch as a source, see, esp., Pelling 1980; 1988; 1990.

4 See Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 1.3–4; Pl. *Leg.* 806a; Plut. *Mor.* 241d, along with Herfst 1922, 18–24, 112–13. Pausanias, however, records Spartan women's

weaving of the tunic (*chitōn*) for the cult statue of Apollo at Amyklai (3.16.2); cf. Alkm. *Partheneia* 1.61 Campbell 1988.

- 5 While Cartledge (2001c, 113) refers to Spartan female homosexuality as ‘alleged’, other scholars have tended to view such relations between Spartan girls and women as a given. See, esp., Pomeroy 1975, 55; 2002, 16 n. 44, 29, 56, 136, 165; 2004, 205; Calame 1977, 1.433–6. On the ostensibly homoerotic overtones of Alkman’s *Partheneia*, see also Pomeroy 1975, 55; Calame 1977, 1.26–7, 2.86–97 and this work, Ch. 7. On the Spartans’ practice of pederasty, see, esp., Cartledge 2001b.
- 6 On Spartan female literacy, see Cartledge 2001c, 114–15. Pomeroy (2002, 4–11) puts far more faith in both Plato’s references to Spartan female learning and the Plutarchan *apophthegmata*. On Spartan literacy in general, see Millender 2001.
- 7 Cf. Cic. *Tusc.* 2.15.36; Prop. 3.14.4; Lucian *Dial. D.* 20.14; Plut. *Lyk.* 14.2; *Mor.* 227d = *Apophth. Lak.*, *Lykourgos* no. 12.
- 8 The five statuettes: (1) Athens, NM, Carapanos 24; (2) Delphi Inv. 3072; (3) London, BM 208; (4) Palermo, MN 8265; (5) Sparta, Museum 3305. See Scanlon 1988, 214 n. 62; Ducat 2006, 236.
- 9 Several ancient sources, however, treat such nudity or semi-nudity as typical of Spartan female comportment rather than as a feature of Spartan female exercise. See Plut. *Comp. Lyk.-Num.* 3.3–4; Poll. 2.187, 7.54–5; Clem. Al. *Paed.* 2.10.114.1; cf. Ath. 13.566e.
- 10 On Spartan girls’ public appearance scantily clad or nude after puberty, see Cartledge 2001c, 114. Stewart (1997, 110, 115–16) discusses the archaeological evidence. Compare the Athenian’s injunctions in Plato’s *Laws* concerning post-pubescent girls’ attire while racing (833d).
- 11 On the correspondence between the two terms, see Hodkinson 2000, 94–5; 2004, 105; Cartledge 2001c, 119.
- 12 For Kyniska, see *IG V.1.1564a*; *Anth. Graec.* 13.16; Xen. *Ages.* 9.6; Plut. *Ages.* 20.1; *Mor.* 212 b (= *Apophth. Lak.*, *Agesilaos* no. 49); Paus. 3.8.1–2, 15.1; 5.12.5; 6.1.6. See Moretti 1957, nos. 373, 381; Poralla and Bradford 1985, no. 459. Cf. Cartledge 1987, 149–50; Hodkinson 2000, esp. 321–3, 327–8; 2004, 111–12; Pomeroy 2002, 21–4; Kyle 2003; Millender 2009, 23–6; forthcoming a and c.
- 13 On these consanguineous marriages, see Hodkinson 2000, 101–3, 407–13; 2004, 114–16; Millender 2009, 16–17.
- 14 For this connection, see Bradford 1986, 17–18; Hodkinson 1989, 112–13; 2000, 437–40; 2004; Mossé 1991, 148; Dettenhofer 1993, esp. 74–7;

Pomeroy 2002, 93; Powell 1999, 411–12; Millender 2009, 30–1; forthcoming c. See also Kunstler 1987, 41–2. *Contra* Ducat 1998, 395, 402 n. 79; cf. Redfield 1977–8, 158–61.

- 15 Since we do not know the date of either Kyniska's death or her heroization, we cannot be sure whether she was heroized before or after Agesilaos' death. I, however, follow Cartledge (1987, 150), who believes that her posthumous heroization occurred while Agesilaos was still alive and 'presumably had his support'.
- 16 Woodward 1908–9, 86–7, no. 90. See Hodkinson 2000, 328, who also mentions (333 n. 48) *IG* V.1.1567, a marble fragment that bears a portion of Kyniska's name. See also Pomeroy 2002, 22 n. 78; Hodkinson 2004, 112, 130 n. 24; Millender 2009, 24–5.

CHAPTER 20

Spartan Education in the Classical Period

Nicolas Richer

(Translated by Anton Powell)

20.1 Introduction

In the mid fourth-century BC, in the *Laws* (659d), Plato wrote that “education [...] consists of training and conduct of children (*hē paidōn holkē te kai agōgē*) on principles that the law declares to be just”. This remark is one of many in this work concerning education, and it underlines how seriously Greeks of the classical period could take the training of children (*paides*).

In Sparta, training given to young people appears to have combined the spirit of rivalry in the service of the community with collective discipline (Hodkinson 1983). Additionally, the concern to inculcate good practices was applied not only to young people, but also to young adults – those aged between twenty and thirty years; the status of the latter may seem to have amounted to a prolonged childhood (Vidal-Naquet 1981, 203). The Spartans had developed a set of particularly well regulated customs to ensure the training of their (male, in particular) youth, as part of a collective organization. Aristotle, though not especially friendly towards Sparta, praises the attention given by the Lakedaimonians to children (*Politics*, 1337a 31–2), and the unusual fact that for them education was organized by the community, and not left to individuals such as parents. Because ancient authors showed such interest in the Spartan education system, this is one of the better-known aspects of the city's history – even though many obscurities remain.¹

Ancient texts concerning Spartan educational practices in the classical era (set out in detail by Ducat 2006, 35–67) show the very important role played by civic institutions. Cartledge (2001, 88) estimates that “the very inauguration of the *agōgē*” could be put “somewhere in the mid-seventh century”, that is at about the time when the power of the ephors, a key element in the Spartan political system (Richer 1998), seems to have been established. The training of Spartan youth is widely seen as marked by austerity, even harshness (Cartledge 2001, 85–6). Thus Powell notes that “Pericles (as reported by Thucydides (2. 39)), Xenophon, Plato and Aristotle concur in describing Spartan education with words from the Greek root *pon-*, which connotes toil or suffering” (2002³, 230).

The whole of this system constitutes what Xenophon – an essential source of information on Sparta in the classical era – calls *paideia* (*Lak. Pol.*, 2. 1; 2. 12; 2. 13; 2. 14); and the magistrate supervising the education of youth is the *paidonomos* (2. 2). For modern historians, the Spartan educational system is commonly designated by the term *agōgē*, though Ducat believes (2006, 69) that the earliest surviving application of this term to Sparta in particular may date from the third century BC. We have already seen that the word is used in a general sense in the mid fourth-century BC, by Plato (as by Aristotle, *Politics*, 1292b 14 and 16); it is used quite certainly about Sparta in the second century AD, by Plutarch (*Agesilaos*, 1. 2), who also applies to Sparta the more general term *paideia* (*Lykourgos*, 14. 1).

Caution must always be applied to Plutarch's texts about classical Sparta (among the most important of which is his *Life of Lykourgos*), because of their late date. They were written nearly half a millennium after the era of Xenophon and Plato. In the meanwhile, Sparta had changed profoundly; in the Hellenistic era there were revolutionary breaks with previous practice. That is the reason why Kennell (1995) urged caution in using Plutarch when trying to understand the customs of the classical period. Nevertheless, the interruptions to the Spartan educational system seem to have been much shorter than Kennell supposes (cf. notably Lévy 1997, 153 and 2003, 51; Ducat 2006, pp. x–xi), which reduces the scope for customs to be forgotten. Also, Plutarch drew very frequently on authors of the classical era, more frequently indeed than he explicitly notes. The fact remains that, where earlier sources are lacking, we may be happy with the possibility of having recourse to Plutarch for various points of Spartan history in the classical era, provided that his information is compatible with that of earlier and thus more authoritative writers.

To have gone through this educational system was considered, in the classical period, as something unique to Sparta (as we see, most notably, from Thucydides, 2. 39. 1, and Xenophon, *Lak. Pol.*, 2. 1–4; 3. 1); it was also seen as virtually defining a Spartan citizen, to judge by statements of Xenophon (*Lak. Pol.*, 3. 3; cf. also 10. 7) according to which the standing of an adult depended on the assessments he had earned as a young man. And Xenophon himself illustrates this principle when he shows a Spartan contemporary of his, Etymokles, reporting remarks of king Agesilaos II made just before the trial of Sphodrias, the perpetrator of an attempted coup against Athens in 378 (*Hellenika*, 5. 4. 32):

he repeats to everyone he speaks to, that no doubt Sphodrias was wrong, but that when someone has spent his childhood, adolescence and youth performing every good act ..., it is very difficult to put such a man to death; for Sparta needs soldiers like that.

Such judgements show the importance accorded to education, and to the

qualities that had been shown by an individual during his training, even after he had become an adult (cf. also, regarding Sparta, Plato, *Republic*, 413e; Aeschines, *Against Timarchos*, 180 – of 346/345 BC; Isokrates, *Panathenaikos*, 211–12 – of c.339 BC; Plutarch, *Moralia*, 235b, regarding events of 331/330 or 330/329).

Moreover, so important may the *paideia* have been that the fact of having gone through it may have given rise to grants of freedom, even of Spartan citizenship, to members of certain out-groups: cf. Lévy 2003, 52, and 158, on the *mothakes*, free men but not Spartan citizens. As *syntrophoi*, these men could have been “raised with” young Spartans, and some may have been able to become citizens of Sparta on condition that they had the required wealth. It may be, however, that such possibilities only existed from the fourth century, from the moment when Sparta suffered from *oliganthropy* (in Aristotle’s term), from a crying shortage of citizens, and need not have caused any changes in the system of education itself. For Plato stresses with the utmost clarity that, among the Lakedaimonians, boys’ education was characterized by great conservatism (*Hippias Major*, 284b; on Plato and Sparta cf. especially Powell 1994). This conservative quality may explain why our sources on education in Sparta show such broad agreement, in representing the entire educational system for boys as consisting of well-defined stages, with the youngsters grouped according to age. That is, the Spartan reality to which different sources at different times had access may have changed rather little. This organization applied to the whole city; it made it possible to inculcate a common culture and to impose discipline on minds as well as bodies. Nor was the education of girls entirely neglected.

20.2 The Stages of Training

20.2.1 The organization of male education according to age groups

Plutarch states (*Lykourgos*, 16. 7) that, to join an educational group (*agela* or *agelē*), children were recruited at the age of seven (*eptaeteis genomenous*). Tazelaar (1967, here pp. 127–9 and 140), interpreted this as meaning that it was between their seventh and eighth birthdays that children were recruited. He is followed by MacDowell (1986, 159–67), who suggested that the Spartans, on a given day of the year, and preferably the first day of each year (perhaps then the spring equinox, marked by the Hyakinthia festival?) – gathered together all the children who appeared to have reached the age of seven. The children grouped in this way may then have progressed together

through the education system until they became *eirenes*, around the age of twenty.

Whether a young person's real age was precisely known or not, it seems that, in daily life, it was made physically very clear to which age group he belonged. It seems that the wearing of characteristically-Spartan long hair was allowed after the *ephēbeia*, that is, from the age of twenty onwards (Xenophon, *Lak. Pol.*, 11. 3; Plutarch, *Lykourgos*, 22. 2). Also, it appears that young men, the *neoi*, were forbidden to wear a moustache; to do so, they had to wait until the age of thirty (Aristotle, *Constitution of the Lakedaimonians*, fr. 545. 1–3 Gigon with the notes of Richer 1998, 251–5).

Thus, even though it might depend on slightly imprecise data, and on the age at which different individuals developed physically, the individual was defined, permanently, as belonging to a particular generation. Ducat noted moreover that the education of young Spartans took place perhaps not so much according to the narrowly-determined age groups as according to broader age categories: in the *Lak. Pol.*, in [chapters 2, 3 and 4](#), Xenophon in fact mentions three successive moments in a boy's education. First, from around seven years of age, he belongs to the *paides* (Xenophon, *Lak. Pol.*, 2. 1–2 with Ducat 2006, 85–6): at that stage he probably could start learning letters and arithmetic. Later, towards fourteen years of age (Ducat 2006, 89–90), he was part of the *paidiskoi*. Then, at twenty, he joined the group of *hēbōntes* (these three stages are also mentioned by Xenophon, *Hellenika*, 5. 4. 32, and these terms may have been the ones actually used at Sparta, according to Ducat 2006, 89–91 and 101 on age limits). The system presented by Plutarch appears to distinguish rather differently: between “children”, the *paides* (aged over seven, *Lykourgos*, 16. 7), and the young people, the *neoi* (aged over twelve, *Lykourgos*, 17. 1 and 16. 12). This may represent an evolution in Spartan practice after the classical period.

The term *agelē* to designate a group of children is not used by Xenophon and, though it appears in Plato (*Laws*, 666e), it was not necessarily peculiar to Sparta. The word *ilē*, used by Xenophon (*Lak. Pol.*, 2. 11) to designate a group of young boys, could be an ordinary Greek usage (Ducat 2006, 78). As for the term *boua*, it appears after the classical period: its existence is deduced particularly from the references to a *bouagos* (“leader of a *boua*”) in thirty-five dedications from 80–240 AD (Ducat 2006, 78), and the term refers ultimately to the idea of cattle (Kennell 1995, 38). According to Xenophon, normally, an *ilē* of children was under the direction of an adult citizen (an *anēr*, *Lak. Pol.*, 2. 11), and it was only exceptionally that the latter was replaced by an *eirēn* (a Spartan in his twenty-first year, the first stage of adulthood, Ducat 2006, 76 and 73; the plural form is *eirenes*).

Envisaging the possibility that mixed aged groups existed in the classical era, Ducat wonders (2006, 80) whether the purpose of such groups was to make possible the supply and functioning of the children's communal meals,

syssitia. In the course of a single day, a child could have belonged alternately to a group combining various ages and to a team of his strict contemporaries, with whom he would have practised activities unrelated to food. Basing himself on Plutarch (*Lykourgos*, 17. 4), who makes a distinction between children with quite developed bodies and other, smaller, ones, Kennell deduces (1995, 41) that in the time of Plutarch (who uses the present tense), there existed teams with a vertical structure, perhaps called the *phylai*, whereas other teams, with a horizontal structure, may have been the *bouai*.

We cannot be sure that educational practices remained unchanged from the classical era onwards, any more than did the numbers in the age groups. Those numbers may have evolved according to Spartan demography more generally, which showed a more and more marked shortage of citizens. Early in the fifth century we read of eight thousand citizen men after the battle of Thermopylai in 480 (Herodotos, 7. 234), while early in the fourth, in the aftermath of the defeat at Leuktra (371), only six hundred citizen men remained after the loss of four hundred in battle (Xenophon, *Hellenika*, 6. 4. 15 and Aristotle, *Politics*, 1270a 30–1). Our evidence suggests that the number of Spartans in each age group at the middle of the fourth century would amount to a few dozen.

The rules to be obeyed in the education system probably became increasingly rigorous as children grew older (Xenophon, *Lak. Pol.*, 3. 2). Our sources say little about exercises like those known elsewhere in Greece (reading and writing, music and dance, and various forms of physical training). Plutarch tells us (*Cimon*, 16. 5) that, c.464, in the moments before a famous earthquake, young people (*neaniskoi*, here distinguished from the ephebes, their elders) were drawn out of the gymnasium by the appearance of a hare, which they began chasing – a fact which saved their lives when the gymnasium collapsed on their elders who had remained inside. The story seems to imply that Spartans practised gymnastic exercises of the type normal in Greece. It may also reflect differences in permitted activity according to age-group – unless it merely reveals that the youngest Spartans had a taste for undisciplined play.

An educational practice unique to Sparta involved theft. According to Xenophon (*Lak. Pol.*, 2. 7–8; cf. also Plutarch, *Lykourgos*, 17. 5–6), young Spartans were encouraged to steal food to supplement their ordinary meals (which must have taken place in a specified place, according to Plutarch, *Lykourgos*, 17. 4). Xenophon justifies this stealing by stressing its educational value, and the fact that youngsters who stole inefficiently and were caught were subjected to punishment. In this context, Xenophon (*Lak. Pol.*, 2. 9) mentions the practice of *bōmolochia*, of theft at the altar of Orthia, which took place amid a hail of blows from whips. The severity of this lashing evidently intensified between the time of Xenophon and that of Plutarch (*Lykourgos*, 18. 2 with Ducat 1995 and Ducat 2006, 249–60). Ducat 2006 suggests (253), that

the whip handlers – set to guard the cheeses placed on the altar – may have been the *mastigophoroi*, the “whip bearers” mentioned elsewhere by Xenophon as assisting the *paidonomos* (*Lak. Pol.*, 2. 2).

Less surprising to other Greeks were the pederastic relationships in which young Spartans could find themselves engaged (Xenophon, *Lak. Pol.*, 2. 12–14), perhaps from the age of twelve (Ducat 2006, 91). Xenophon denies that sexual consummation was involved, though he makes clear that he does not expect this denial to be believed. A relationship of this kind did have the effect of adding to a young person’s individuality, but only within recognized limits, since his *erastēs*, the older lover who initiated him, was required to ingrain in him the values cherished by the community. Such training was all the more important since a young person had to win the good opinion of others before he was allowed to attend an adult dining group, *syssition* (cf. Xenophon, *Lak. Pol.*, 3. 5 and 5. 5 on the presence of young people at the *syssition*, and, on the vote for admission, Plutarch, *Lykourgos*, 12. 9–11). Probably, the good opinion of the *erastēs*, as sponsor, was involved here. Now, according to Aristotle (*Politics*, 1271a 35–7), membership of a *syssition* was a requirement for Spartan citizenship, and relationships formed in youth might also be crucial for appointment to political posts later in life (Cartledge 2001, 91–105 and 206–12). Nevertheless, it seems that some young people were awarded distinction at the end of their training, not so much because of their social relationships as because of their own merits, and in a way which gave them the chance to gain further, exceptional, distinction as achievers of the *krypteia*.

20.2.2 The *krypteia*

The *kryptoi* bore a name indicating that they had to hide (*kryptein*); these young people were to be sent into the countryside armed only with a dagger. Several ancient sources mention their activities (on which see especially Ducat 1997a, 1997b; 2006, 281–331 [in English]; 2009). It seems that the *krypteia* was reserved for an elite of young people, “those judged to have the most intelligence” (Plutarch, *Lykourgos*, 28. 3). Being *neoi* (Plutarch, *ibid.*) they might be between twenty-one and thirty years of age (Ducat 1997a, 63), and they were selected by “officials” (*archontes*; Plutarch, *ibid.*; according to Ducat 2006, 296, this might mean the ephors).

The *krypteia* had about it something of military training: in a speech attributed to his Spartan character Megillos, Plato states that Lykourgos invented four ways of making young people into good warrior-citizens, the *syssitia*, physical exercises, hunting and “things that harden against suffering” (*Laws*, 633b–c). Plato then mentions, immediately afterwards, the exercise of endurance called *krypteia*. One stressful element of the *krypteia* may have been its length: a

scholiast, an ancient commentator, on *Laws*, 633b, states that the *kryptoi* lived apart from society for a whole year (*eniauton holon*). Plato himself stresses that the *krypteia* took place in winter. Some modern writers have interpreted the *krypteia* as part of an initiation rite (thus Jeanmaire 1913), involving the temporary inversion of roles which often characterizes such activities (Vidal-Naquet 1981, 161–3, 201). Thus the *kryptos* acted in a manner opposite to that of the hoplite he was to become: unlike a heavily armed soldier, the *kryptos* was “naked” (scholion to Plato), without weapons apart from a dagger (Plutarch). Moreover, whereas it was of the essence of a hoplite that he operated as part of a phalanx in daylight, the *kryptoi* were solitary (Plato and scholiast), at least dispersed in the daytime to rest, says Plutarch.

However, though he might be in a marginal situation rather like that of a helot, the *kryptos* was also – unlike the helot – in an eminently transitory state. Indeed, he played a part in the process of spreading terror, *phobos*, among the helots, to keep the latter in a state of disciplined labour, and to maintain social and political order. The ephors, when they entered office (at the autumn equinox), solemnly proclaimed a declaration of war against the helots. Accordingly, no Spartan who killed a helot was religiously polluted by his action, because to kill an enemy of the state was legal (Aristotle, *Constitution of the Lakedaimonians*, fr. 543 Gigon, *apud* Plutarch, *Lykourgos*, 28. 7 with Richer 1998, 250). As a result, even though a young *kryptos* was in a situation where he had virtually only himself to rely on, he was still operating in a framework defined by the city. When eventually he returned to his community, he was bound to appreciate all the more the advantages of being fully part, once again, of an elaborate social system, and to dedicate himself to defending it.

20.2.3 The hippeis and the agathoergoi

Although some scholars have thought otherwise (Vidal-Naquet 1981, 201), it does not seem that those who had formerly been *kryptoi* necessarily went on to join the corps of *hippeis*, the elite body of three hundred “horsemen” (in reality infantry) who carried out policing tasks. Between twenty and thirty years of age, these horsemen were chosen by the three *hippagretai* (who were perhaps assigned at the rate of one per tribe), according to Xenophon (*Lak. Pol.*, 4, with Figueira 2006 and Ducat 2007). Although assigned the adult status of *hēbōntes*, they still remained to a degree under the control of the *paidonomos*, the “controller of children” (Xenophon, *Lak. Pol.*, 4. 6). Among them, too, annual age group classifications must have existed, judging for example by the way in which Xenophon uses an expression, *ta deka aph’hēbēs* (*Hellenika*, 2. 4. 32; 3. 4. 23; 4. 5. 14; *Agésilaios*, 1. 31) to indicate ten classes of men in the army (“the ten from *hēbē* upwards”), the oldest of

whom must have been thirty. The expression shows how the *hēbē*, around the age of twenty, could have been a turning point in the life of a Spartan.²

In addition, time passed among the *hippeis* (ten years in the best of cases) could end with a new distinction marking qualities shown up to the age of thirty: a *hippeus* could become *agathoergos*. According to Herodotos (1. 67):

the *agathoergoi* are citizens (*eisi tōn astōn*), the five oldest of those who leave the body of *hippeis* each year. In the year (*eniautos*) after they quit the *hippeis*, they must travel intensively on separate missions for the service of the community of Spartans (*Spartiēteōn tōi koinōi*)

Herodotos is the only source to mention the *agathoergoi* – their name means literally those who accomplished good action. The actions in question might well be performed outside Spartan territory, as Herodotos' information here suggests. We do not know for how long the institution of *agathoergoi* existed, although it evidently survived from the sixth into the fifth centuries.

Rivalries produced by the competition to join the three hundred *hippeis* – which enabled a man in turn to become *agathoergos* – would be all the more intense since, like the whole of the educational curriculum, it took place in view of all the citizens. Education was the concern of the entire community.

20.3 An Organization which Concerns the Whole City

When describing educational practices at Sparta, Xenophon stresses the role of fathers acting together, as a generational group. Thus we read (*Lak. Pol.*, 6. 2):

When a child who has been hit by another father goes and complains to his own, the latter is honour-bound to inflict further blows upon his son. That is how far [fathers at Sparta] trust each other not to give children (*paides*) any improper command (*mēden aischron*).

Whether the children in question were those too young to spend their days grouped with their contemporaries, or whether they had free time outside the system of age group training, it goes without saying that they were submitted to the authority of their elders (cf. also Plutarch, *Lykourgos*, 16. 9 and 17. 1). For, says Xenophon (*Lak. Pol.*, 2. 10):

so that the children should not remain without direction, even when the *paidonomos* was absent, Lykourgos gave to every citizen who happened to be present on whatever occasion full authority to give them whatever instructions he thought fit, and to punish any misbehaviour.

We can infer that this supervision by fathers (and, one can be sure, by grandfathers) applied where houses were grouped together, at Sparta, but not around dwellings scattered in the countryside. In any case, this education under the eye of adults did not depend primarily on chance, on whether this or that adult happened to be near the children. Normally, each group would act under the supervision of a prescribed adult, who was under the ultimate control of the *paidonomos*. The latter held one of the most important magistracies of Sparta, says Xenophon (*Lak. Pol.*, 2. 2), and his name indicates that he controlled the behaviour of the children. He was chosen from among the citizens, *ek tōn kalōn kai agathōn*, “from men of physical and moral distinction”, according to Plutarch (*Lykourgos*, 17. 2). As Xenophon explicitly does (*Lak. Pol.*, 2. 1–2), Plutarch here contrasts the system common elsewhere in Greece, whereby slaves were used as *paidagōgoi*. Xenophon adds that young people carrying whips, the *mastigophoroi*, were assigned to accompany the *paidonomos*, to inflict the necessary punishments – on his orders, we assume. Plutarch makes clear (*Lykourgos*, 18. 6–7) that the *eirēn* in charge of a group of children was answerable to his elders (adult citizens rather than people of old age) and to the magistrates present, who observed his manner of inflicting punishment. The magistrates in question may be the *paidonomos* and his attendants. For the *paidonomos* may have been assisted by *ampaides*, whom the lexicographer Hesychios defined as “those who, among the Laconians, were in charge of the children”.

In fact, the very proliferation of technical terms for Spartan educational roles is evidence of the seriousness, and formality, with which pedagogy was treated at Sparta. The sphere of competence of the *paidonomos* was such that he could arrange for young adults (*hēbōntes*) who got out of control to be punished by the ephors, according to Xenophon (*Lak. Pol.*, 4. 6) – so, evidently a young Spartan only left the education system slowly and by degrees.

A further sign of the extreme importance accorded to the education of the young is that the ephors, the supreme magistrates of Sparta, paid close attention to educational outcomes (cf. Plutarch, *Moralia*, 235b). According to Agatharchides (*FGrHist*, 86, fr. 10 quoted by Athenaeus, 12, 550C–D), writing in the second century BC, every ten days young people, naked, were examined by the ephors, who checked that their bodies “emerging from the gymnasium [were] as if they had been sculpted or chiselled”, and not deformed by excess food, according to the expression of Aelian (*Miscellany*, 14. 7) who confirms this point.

But the responsibilities of young people, future citizens, went beyond putting well-exercised bodies at the service of the community; they also had to absorb the rules which would govern them as adults.

20.4 Training Young People in the Service of the City

20.4.1 The bases of a common culture

According to Plutarch (*Lykourgos*, 16. 10), the Spartans learned reading and writing as far as was “useful”. We should note that since the ephors – who, in order to fulfil their role, had to use written documents – were recruited from the whole of the people, evidently the citizens commonly knew how to read, in spite of a malicious and exaggerated claim to the contrary by the Athenian Isokrates in 342–339 (*Panathenaikos*, 209; cf. Ducat 2006, 119–21). Xenophon refers to the teaching of reading, writing and gymnastics in a way that suggests that such instruction was part of the training given at Sparta, under the direction of the *paidonomos* (*Lak. Pol.*, 2. 1–2, cf. especially Plutarch, *Lykourgos*, 16. 10 and 21. 1; *Moralia*, 237A). On the uses of literacy at Sparta cf. e.g. Richer 1998, 489–90 with cross-references there; Cartledge 2001, 39–54 and 197–201; Millender 2001.

The quality of Spartan education is attested also by Plato (*Protagoras*, 342e; cf. Richer 2001); it resulted in a use of language that was strictly measured, “laconic” and limited to what was necessary (on the “laconic” speech of the Spartans cf. especially Thucydides, 1. 86. 1; 4. 17. 2, and the apophthegms collected at Plutarch, *Moralia*, 208A–242D. For modern treatments, see e.g. Richer 2001, 40–2; Ducat 2002). Spartans were probably familiar with the poetry not only of Terpandros and Alkman, but also of Tyrtaios who had lived in Sparta (Philochoros, *FGrHist*, 328, fr. 216, *apud* Athenaeus, 14. 630D), and with the works of Homer and Hesiod. (On “literature and culture” in Sparta cf. Birgalias 1999, [chapter 3](#). On music in Sparta cf. e.g. Birgalias 1999, 205–11; Lévy 2003, 54; Ducat 2006, index. s.v. “musical education”, Calame in [Chapter 7](#), this work).

The great community religious celebrations, the Hyakinthia, Gymnopaidiai and Karneia, certainly constituted for young Spartans important moments which contributed to making them full members of the community – all the more so since they themselves took part (cf. in particular Ducat 2006, [chapter 8](#); Richer 2007a, 247 and 2012, [chapters 8, 9 and 10](#)), for instance when they held a part in choirs next to their elders.

The Spartans were also equipped with established chronological reference-points through their knowledge of genealogy (such as those of the Spartan kings; cf. Plato, *Hippias Major*, 285d), but such a knowledge was subject to fluctuations due to transient contemporary, political needs (cf. Nafissi, [Chapter 4](#) in this work). Also, by attending celebrations in honour of men of the past – such as Leonidas or the regent Pausanias (cf. Pausanias the

Periegete, 3. 14. 1) – or meetings of a *philition* (Xenophon, *Lak. Pol.*, 3. 5) – otherwise called *syssition* – a young man could assimilate elements of an oral tradition which amounted to collective memory, supposed to be transmitted from generation to generation, and embodying the society's ideals and standards of behaviour. Dikaiarchos, a pupil of Aristotle, wrote a *Constitution of the Lakedaimonians* which over a long period was read every year to the ephebes assembled at the headquarters of the ephors, the *ephoreion* (Dikaiarchos, *FHG*, II, p. 241, fr. 21). One may suppose that, in order to have been used in such a way, Dikaiarchos's work fitted the will of officials, for the sake of political cohesion.

In addition to the institutional supervision given by the ephors (Richer 1998, [chapters 24](#) and [25](#)), Sparta used various techniques to give, to the group, control over each of its members. Young people were regularly exposed to conversation about the positive qualities of eminent Spartans, of the past and the present (Richer 2017, 92–93). The young would hear such discussions at the gymnasia and the *syssitia* (but perhaps not at the agora, since attendance there was forbidden until the age of thirty, according to Plutarch, *Lykourgos*, 25. 1). In addition, women – and mothers especially – might memorably instruct and cajole males, formally as well as in private, as to where their duty, as Spartans, lay (Ducat 1999b, in particular 162–4; Figueira 2010).

Now the aim of Spartan education – as sons were reminded by their mothers, who acted as “partisans of morality” (*sectatrices du code*: Ducat 1998, 397) – was largely military. It “consisted of learning to obey thoroughly, to bear fatigue patiently and to win in combat”, as Plutarch summarized it (*Lykourgos*, 16. 10; in the *Moralia*, 237A, it is stated that what mattered was knowing “how to win or die in combat”). That is why the Spartans paid such attention to disciplining minds and bodies.

20.4.2 Disciplining minds and bodies

In classical Sparta, collective education aimed to develop a sense of discipline and obedience: its perceived basis was self-control (Xenophon, *Lak. Pol.*, 2. 2), and it commonly involved submission to one's elders. Education, by sensitizing the young to praise and blame, effectively teaches *what it is that attracts* praise and blame, in other words the values of the society. Those values at Sparta were hammered in, often by physical coercion, and probably backed up by the cult of the *pathēmata*, as we shall see. By such means was procured the solidarity in battle which the young would later show.

Recourse, probably frequent, to corporal punishments

Our sources often mention the role of corporal punishments in the educational practices of Sparta. As we have seen, any adult citizen – and not just the father – could hit a boy as he saw fit (Xenophon, *Lak. Pol.*, 6. 2). According to Plutarch, a boy could have his thumb bitten if he gave an unsatisfactory answer to a question put by the *eirēn* in charge of his group (Plutarch, *Lykourgos*, 18. 3). The *mastigophoroi*, the young adult attendants of the *paidonomos*, chosen among the *hebōntēs*, inflicted punishment with their whips (Xenophon, *Lak. Pol.*, 2. 2); young people caught stealing food were liable to be whipped (Plutarch, *Lykourgos*, 17. 5).

Painful training

Physical pain, as well as being a punishment for failure, was seen as a positive and necessary training in endurance. The young were not intended to become indifferent to bodily suffering, but to be toughened so as best to serve the community. Thucydides spells out the rationale of this, when he represents (2. 39. 1) the Athenian Perikles (in the winter of 431/430) contrasting Sparta with Athens:

as for education, unlike some people who establish a painful system of training (*epiponos askēsis*) from childhood onwards in order to produce manly courage (*to andreion*), we, with our free life-style, face equivalent dangers at least as well.

These words in Thucydides gain in force because his readers have previously (1. 84. 4), seen king Archidamos of Sparta claim that:

the strongest man (*kratistos*) is the one whose education (*paideia*) has involved the maximum of compulsion (*en tois anankaiotatois*).

Besides, on the evident aim of Spartan education, Isokrates (in the *Panathenaikos*, § 217, completed around 339) puts the following words into the mouth of a pro-Spartan student of his:

When I said that, I wasn't thinking of their religious commitment, their justice and wisdom, of which you spoke, but of the gymnastic exercises practised there, of the training in manly courage (*askēsis tēs andreias*), of their degree of harmony, in short, of their preparation for war, behaviour all people would praise, and which one can say is valued by them more than in any other community.

To any criticism, Sparta's partisans no doubt had a standard reply: that the victory of 404 over Athens had indeed shown where the best practices lay. Subsequent failures in foreign policy (largely due, no doubt, to Sparta's shortage of citizen population) were therefore a natural target for fourth-

century critics of Sparta's education system, such as Aristotle (*Politics*, 1338b 24–32):

Besides, the Spartans themselves, we know, so long as they were the only ones to devote themselves to painful exercises, maintained their superiority over other peoples, but now they are far behind others, both in sporting competitions and in war. They were superior in the past not because of their way of exercising young people, but because they had military training and their opponents did not. So it is honour (*to kalon*) and not brutality (*to thēriōdes*) which should be the main element in education; for neither a wolf nor any other wild animal would risk fighting on a point of honour (for a noble risk, *kalos kindynos*); that, rather, is the action of a man of high principle (*anēr agathos*).

This passage of Aristotle is remarkable for combining criticisms which are not of the same order. At the beginning, it is not the methods of education in themselves which are deemed insufficient, since the Laconians are simply presented as having been surpassed by others (presumably the Thebans), who used the same methods. But Aristotle goes on not to suggest that the Spartans could recover their superiority by intensifying the methods in which others had surpassed them: no doubt he thought that if those already-brutal methods were made yet more severe it might cause the community to destroy itself. Instead, he recommends a change in principle: that a state such as Sparta should give up savage behaviour like that of a wolf, and should (he seems to mean) model itself more on the lion, which he has just mentioned as an example of gentler habits (*Politics*, 1338b 18–19; on these animal comparisons involving Sparta cf. Richer 2010, 14).

Aristotle's picture of Sparta should, however, be resisted, to a degree. Half a century earlier, Xenophon described Spartan training not as involving the blind unleashing of brute force but as a complex process of learning by individual and group, of how to fight in the phalanx (*Lak. Pol.*, 11. 7). Xenophon also stresses (2. 7) that Spartan education leads children to devise cunning tricks in order to obtain food. So, Spartan education does not seem to have been entirely founded on unrestrained violent practices, and when Aristotle alludes to the bad model of the wolf, he probably alludes to the suggestive name of the mythical legislator of Sparta, Lykourgos ("He who acts as a wolf, or He who repels the wolf"). In so doing, the philosopher recalls the critical analysis of the Spartan system he has previously delivered in the second book of the *Politics*, but such a point of view was not shared by everybody during the fourth century.

Coming of age at Sparta may have involved some twenty years of being hit, quite often, by other Spartans. In Xenophon's day, young adults, the *hēbōntes*, sometimes fought it out from rivalry caused by the competition to be chosen as *hippeis* (Xenophon, *Lak. Pol.*, 4, with Ducat 2007). Plato may have made a

formal list of ways in which young Spartans were “toughened up” (*Laws*, 633b–c with Ducat 2009). In this list we may detect an allusion to the combats which took place at the Platanistas. Here, according to Pausanias, writing in the second century AD, two opposing teams of young people fought each other on an island, with no blows barred, until one team had thrown all the members of the other into the surrounding water (Pausanias, 3. 14. 8–10 with Richer 2012, [chapter 11](#)).

20.4.3 Mastering the *pathēmata*

Alongside customs involving force as a means of disciplining individuals, another characteristic feature of Sparta appears to have been the prominent role given to *pathēmata*, abstract representations of physical states which it was every Spartan’s duty to strive to master (Richer 1998, 217–233, 1999, 2001, 52–55, 2007a, 248–9, 2012 [chapter 2](#)). Such states were regarded as sacred in Sparta (Plutarch, *Kleomenes*, 9. 1). They included *Phobos*, Fear (Plutarch, *Kleomenes*, 9. 1); *Aidōs*, Self-Control arising from regard for others’ opinions (Xenophon, *Banquet*, 8. 35; Pausanias, 3. 20. 10–11); *Hypnos*, Sleep (Pausanias, 3. 18. 1); *Thanatos*, Death (Plutarch, *Kleomenes*, 9. 1; Pausanias, 3. 18. 1); *Gelōs*, the Laugh (Sosibios, *FGrHist*, 595, fr. 19 *apud* Plutarch, *Lykourgos*, 25. 4; Plutarch, *Kleomenes*, 9. 1); *Erōs*, Love (Sosikrates, *FGrHist*, 461, fr. 7 *apud* Athenaeus, 13.561 E–F; in Laconia, at Leuktra, cf. Pausanias, 3. 26. 5); *Limos*, Hunger or Famine (Callisthenes, *FGrHist*, 124, fr. 13 *apud* Athenaeus, 10.452B; Polyain, 2. 15); *Dipsa*, Thirst, may also belong to the list (cf. Plutarch, *Lykourgos* 2. 1–3 and *Moralia*, 232A).

The prominence of these *pathēmata* can be traced from as early as the seventh century, when the poet Tyrtaios (fr. 6–7 Prato = 10 West), in an elegy containing an exhortation to combat, mentions *Thanatos* (l.1), *Aidōs* (l. 12), *Phobos* (l. 16), *Erōs* (l.28) and, implicitly (in ll. 3–4), *Limos*. Later, in the *Lak. Pol.* of c.377 BC, describing the education of children, Xenophon shows the role held by a certain number of these *pathēmata*. The *paidonomos* clearly inspires *Phobos* (not named) in young Spartans (2. 2); as a result, in Sparta one sees “much *Aidōs* along with much obedience” (*ibid.*; cf. also 2. 10). The children learn to tame *Limos* (2. 5–6), and can complement their diet by mastering *Hypnos* for “anyone intending to steal must remain awake at night” (2. 7). Finally, Xenophon states that he “must also speak of love of young boys”, of homosexual *Erōs*, that is (2. 12). The only known *pathēma* absent from Xenophon’s picture are *Thanatos* (explicable by the fact that very young Spartans are not yet good at fighting) and *Gelōs*. But *Gelōs* does play a role in the training of young people, according to Plutarch (*Lykourgos*, 12. 6. For

references to *pathēmata* in Plutarch's representation of the *sysition*, see Richer 1998, 228–9).

Presumably drawing on the Spartan model (Morrow 1993², 533; Powell 1994, 287–92), Plato in the mid fourth century considered that:

if the legislator wishes to tame one of these passions which most predictably enslave men, he will readily know how to succeed. All he has to do is to confer sanctity (*kathierōsas*) on the principle in the mind of everyone, slaves, free men, children, women, the whole city, and, in this way, he will have put this law on the most secure basis. (*Laws*, 838d–e)

We see here a very close link between strengthening social constraint and sanctifying the sentiments which encourage submission to it. Now, Xenophon asserts (*Lak. Pol.*, 2. 15) that Spartan education produces “men who are more disciplined, more self-controlled, more masters (*enkratesteroi*) of the desires which must be curbed”, than one sees elsewhere in Greece. Here Xenophon attributes to Sparta and its education system very much the kind of success that Plato had been prescribing for his ideal state. That religion reinforced such a system is surely something on which both men would have agreed.

Remarkably for a Greek city, Sparta made systematic educational arrangements for girls too.

20.5 The Education of Girls

20.5.1 Physical education with a eugenic purpose

Our ancient sources on the education of girls in Sparta are set out conveniently in chronological order by Birgalias (1999, 253–90). Among them are Xenophon, Plato, Aristotle and Plutarch. But the information they give is difficult to handle; much remains unclear. Birgalias, Ducat and others see useful evidence in a passage of Athenian comedy from the late fifth century: here the poet Aristophanes fantasizes about the arrival at Athens of a Spartan woman, Lampito (*Lysistrata*, 78–82). The humour is constructed to emphasize, exaggerate, differences between Spartan and Athenian women:

LYSISTRATA:

Ah! Welcome, Lampito, my dear Laconian. How radiant is your beauty, sweet lady. What a complexion! And your whole body is bursting with robustness! You could strangle a bull!

LAMPITO:

Right, by the Twin Gods! I do gymnastics and kick up my heels against my bottom.

Even allowing for comic exaggeration, it may indeed be that at Sparta physical and muscular development was a criterion of female beauty. Exercise was thus needed, for female children and adults; Lampito is a married woman. Ducat concludes, from a survey of written and iconographical sources (2006, 230–4), that the most important exercises for females were the foot race and the trials of strength in the form of wrestling referred to by Xenophon (*Lak. Pol.*, 1. 4; cf. also Plutarch, *Lykourgos*, 14. 3).

The aim of this physical education of girls is explained by Xenophon. The exercises of females and males alike supposedly had a eugenic purpose: to promote *teknopoiia*, procreation, and the birth of sturdy children (*Lak. Pol.*, 1. 4; cf. also Critias, ed. Diels and Kranz 88, fr. 32, *apud* Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, 6. 9). But when the literary tradition on Sparta touches on reproduction and the physical qualities of women, then, in Ducat's phrase (2006, 223), “fantasy springs up everywhere”. There is much reference to libertine behaviour, to “women who flash their thighs” (*phainomērides*)” (Ibykos of Rhegion, fr. 58 Page, *apud* Plutarch, *Comparison of Lykourgos and Numa*, 3. 6; cf. in particular, c.420–410 BC, Euripides, *Andromache*, 596–601 with the detailed analysis of Ducat 2006, 234–7 – and, more generally, Aristotle, *Politics*, 1269b 12–23). One Spartan practice which very likely gave rise to much of this fantasy involved processions in which adolescents of both sexes, *koroi* and *korai* (or *parthenoi*, “unmarried girls”), were obliged to walk naked. Plutarch is the only source for this practice (*Lykourgos*, 14. 4 and 7; *Moralia*, 227E); it may have had a religious purpose (Plutarch, *Moralia*, 239C).

However, in spite of the attention paid to the visible development of girls' bodies, Sparta in the classical period did not produce any women who took part in warfare. During the invasion of Laconia by the Thebans and their allies in 369, Sparta's women proved to be “perfectly useless”, and “caused more confusion than the enemy”, according to Aristotle (*Politics*, 1269b 38–9). Even the pro-Spartan Xenophon seems to have agreed (*Hellenika*, 6. 5. 28; cf. also Plutarch, *Agessilaos*, 31. 5. For modern debate on this memorable episode, Ducat 1999b, 165–7; Powell 2004). Plato probably had this reported failure of Spartan women in mind when he criticized Sparta for not having females take part in exercises of a military nature (*Laws*, 806a).

20.5.2 Elements of female *paideusis*

On the other hand, in the *Protagoras* (342d), Plato has his revered Socrates

say that at Sparta not only men but women too can pride themselves on their education, on their *paideusis*. This implies that lessons in reading and writing, and probably in arithmetic, were available for girls, or at least for some of them, though we have no information on where and how such teaching occurred. To judge by a passage of Plutarch (*Moralia*, 241D–E), describing Teleutia the mother of Pedaritos, when the latter was harmost in Chios in 412/411, a Spartan woman at that period was supposed to be able to write to her son.

If Spartan women could be proud of their *paideusis*, of what they had learned, what exactly was it that they learned? Plato states (*Laws*, 806a) that the *korai*, the girls, of Sparta had to take part in activities both gymnastic and involving *mousikē* (which comprised not only music but also dance and singing). Some Spartan girls would learn *mousikē* while taking part in choirs, the work of which, from the time of Alkman (seventh century), has been studied by Calame (1977, 1997 and this volume, [Chapter 7](#)). These choirs had a female leader (*chorēgos*), were under the general direction of a male professional poet, and performed at festivals and in competitions.

In order to become, as adults, “partisans” of Spartan morality, Spartan girls had to share the local beliefs about how their male contemporaries should behave. Girls had a formal role in ridiculing under-performing males and acclaiming the best, according to Plutarch (*Lykourgos*, 14. 5–6). Since in the same passage Plutarch mentions Spartan kings, he seems to refer to a period before the end of the third century BC. Spartan women, then, were not trained to act like men, but they were taught how men were supposed to act, and thus to be able to guide men’s actions and character. As Cartledge has put it (2001, 115), the main aim of the education given to girls was “to socialize the non-military half of the population in the values of a peculiarly masculine warrior culture”.

20.5.3 A system parallel to masculine training?

Modern writers have more than once suggested that there was a parallelism between male and female education systems at Sparta, with the female system being modelled on the male (e.g. Nilsson 1908; more balanced opinion in Vidal-Naquet 1981, 205–6). Support for this idea may be seen in the fact that Plutarch presents Spartan female homosexuality in parallel with the male kind (*Lykourgos*, 18. 9). Also, we find reference to girls grouped into *agelai* (Pindar, fr. 112 Snell), a term also used for groups of boys. But this word is a common poetic usage for a group of girls, figured as fillies (Ducat 2006, 242), so may not here be a technical term. There is only meagre evidence on the question whether Spartan girls were like boys in being divided into age-groups for educational purpose: the adjective *synomalikes*, used in a Spartan

connection by the poet Theocritus early in the third century (18, *Epithalamium of Helen*, 22), to designate girls “of the same age”.

The kinds of physical exercise required of Spartan girls were few, so far as we know. It has been argued (by Paradiso 1986) that, for girls, it was marriage that contained several elements of initiation rite corresponding to aspects of boys’ education. But marked differences exist between what girls and what boys were supposed to do, and all references to educational acts involving force concern boys.

Specifically feminine, on the other hand, was the responsibility, within the family, for domestic service, management of the household and the rearing of children, to use Plato’s words (*Laws*, 806a). Girls, then, probably had also to prepare themselves daily at home for their future role as “wives and mothers of Spartan soldiers”, in the words attributed to Gorgo, the daughter of Kleomenes and wife of Leonidas (Plutarch, *Lykourgos*, 14. 8; *Moralia*, 227E and 240E).

Given the probable importance of this domestic role, one may, like Ducat (2006, 243), suspect that only girls from elite families had access to the training given in the choirs. The same scholar emphasizes that we have no evidence that girls’ education was either organized or financed by the Spartan state. Nevertheless, it is certain that education for girls did exist, even if it was less systematically developed than that for boys. It is possible that the two systems were of similar antiquity (Ducat 2006, 243), while the only sign that the boys’ system influenced the girls was the practice by girls of wrestling, besides racing which is known elsewhere as a feminine exercise.

20.6 Conclusion: A Complex System

To understand exactly how education was organized in classical Sparta is not easy. But other Greeks of the period may have been well enough informed to express a useful opinion. There are, for example, “numerous points in the education system which Plato is imagining for his ideal city that seem to be inspired by the Spartan model, which obviously means that he approves of them” (Ducat 2006, 54).

Now, Plato advocates compulsory education, identical for all and organized by the city (*Laws*, 804d). So closely do Plato’s ideals resemble Spartan reality that the well-informed Plutarch could use of Sparta (*Lykourgos*, 15. 14) a phrase echoing Plato’s words (*Laws*, 804d): that children belong not so much to their parents as to their city. In Plutarch’s mind the utopias conceived by Plato may indeed have been close in numerous ways to the realities of Sparta. The constant concern of Plato to select the best people (*Republic*, 413c–e; *Politics*, 308c–d, *Laws*, 969b–c) was matched by Sparta in its educational

practices (Xenophon, *Lak. Pol.*, 4. 2 for the adult *hēbōntes*; Plutarch, *Lykourgos*, 16. 9 for children aged over seven and below twelve, apparently). Similarly, the principle of delegating authority, expressed in Xenophon's account of Spartan education (*Lak. Pol.*, 2. 10–11), is found also in the ideal city of Plato's *Laws* (969b–c). Finally, just as the head of Plato's imaginary education system (*Laws*, 765d) “occupies the most important of the city's highest magistracies” (*Laws*, 765d–e), the real Spartan *paidonomos* mentioned by Xenophon is “a citizen among those who occupy the highest magistracies” (*Lak. Pol.*, 2. 2). Choirs and combats are two other features shared by Spartan reality and Platonic utopia (Ducat 2006, 56–57).

However, Plato is clearly critical of the way that Spartan education emphasized the preparation for war. In his view, justice, moderation, intelligence and manly courage were the four forms of virtue that should be cultivated, without the last-mentioned being privileged as it was at Sparta (cf. *Laws*, 630a–d; 666e – 667a). Plato also criticizes Spartan education for permitting pederasty (*Laws*, 636b, 836b).

In general, Spartan education seems to have been organized to reflect the needs – and especially the military ones – that adults felt in their own lives and the practices they had established within the adult community. Thus the competition which existed within the education system foreshadows the competition experienced later by the same individuals as adults. And what chiefly determined how adults were ranked was how well each was thought to serve the community. And therein lies one of the greatest paradoxes of Spartan culture: every man wished to be the best, whereas one objective of the collective lifestyle was to smooth out disparities suggesting social difference, and to promote similarity, *homoiotēs*, in all (Hodkinson, 1983).

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NOTES

- 1 On education in Sparta, particularly useful are the general works of Kennell 1995 and (often critical of the latter) Ducat 2006 (which supersedes Ducat 1999a); cf. also (in French) Birgalias 1999 and (in Italian) Lupi 2000.
- 2 A sign that adulthood was attained very gradually at Sparta, can be seen in the fact that even marriage was not seen as a change important enough to require a young man to cease living with his friends, according to Plutarch,

Lykourgos, 15. 7.

CHAPTER 21

Sparta and Athletics

Paul Christesen

21.1 Introduction: Sources and Definitions

In his history of the Persian Wars Herodotos recounts a story about the Persian king Xerxes sending a spy to observe the Greek forces stationed at Thermopylai. The Greeks know that they are about to be attacked, and in all likelihood killed, by a massive Persian army, yet the spy finds the Spartan soldiers on guard duty spending their time exercising in the nude and combing their hair. According to Herodotos (7.208), Xerxes found the Spartans' behavior difficult to understand, and a modern-day reader of Herodotos may well share his consternation. The Spartan soldiers, however, were simply following their normal routine, which included devoting a good deal of their time to sports. Indeed, sports played a prominent role in Spartan life for centuries.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to write a comprehensive history of sports in Sparta, because of the nature of the sources at our disposal. Those sources, which consist primarily of literary texts and inscriptions, have at least five important limitations that need to be borne in mind. First, they were in large part produced by people who were not themselves Spartans and who in many cases did not have a great deal of familiarity with Sparta. Spartans showed little interest in writing about themselves, and non-Spartans had some difficulty in learning about Spartans, who were not particularly welcoming to outsiders. Much of what was written about Sparta was, as a result, to a greater or lesser extent based on rumors and imagination.

Second, many ancient (and some modern) accounts offer a highly idealized picture of Sparta that cannot be accepted at face value. This idealization of Sparta is typically called the Spartan mirage. For many ancient Greeks, especially Greeks in later periods who were thinking back to times past, Sparta became a nearly blank canvas onto which they projected utopian fantasies.

Third, there is a tendency in some ancient and modern sources to minimize the extent to which Sparta changed over time. Many ancient writers subscribed to the almost certainly erroneous belief that the entire Spartan socio-political system was constructed at an early date by a lawgiver named Lykourgos ('Lycurgos') and remained unchanged for centuries. Until the late

twentieth century much of the modern scholarship on Sparta showed a problematic tendency to assume that the socio-political system that existed in Sparta around 650 BCE was preserved largely intact well into the Roman period. This assumption made it possible to construct a picture of an unchanging Spartan society using sources from widely different dates. It is, however, now clear that such an approach is untenable for the simple reason that Sparta changed significantly over the course of time.

Fourth, although Sparta has been fairly thoroughly excavated, the extant material remains are less extensive and informative than one might hope. It is correspondingly difficult, therefore, to verify and supplement the available textual sources.

Fifth, the sources for Spartan sports come largely from the classical (480–323 BCE) and Roman (146 BCE–396 CE) periods and tell us primarily about the activities of Spartan male citizens (Spartiates or *homoioi*) and, to a lesser extent, of their unmarried daughters. We know relatively little about Spartan sports in other periods or about the sports activities of members of other groups, such as *perioikoi* and helots, which made up the majority of the population of the Spartan state.¹

The brief discussion that follows reflects the nature of the sources at our disposal. We will look solely at the classical period and assume that the practice of sports in Sparta did not change radically over the course of that time. There was no doubt some change in Spartan sports in the century and a half after 480, but it seems to have been sufficiently minimal as to make it possible to treat that period as a single unit. The focus throughout will be on Spartiates and their unmarried daughters.

The single most important source for athletics in Sparta in the classical period is the Athenian soldier, philosopher, and author Xenophon (born c.430, died c.350). Xenophon served as an officer in a unit of mercenary soldiers that worked for the Spartans and was an admirer of their lifestyle. The years he spent fighting alongside Spartans and the friendships he developed with some of their leading men put him in a unique position to write knowledgeably about Sparta. Xenophon penned a short treatise, the *Lakedaimoniōn Politeia* (*Constitution of the Spartans*), that provides a reasonably good sense of Spartan sports in the first half of the fourth century.²

The information supplied by Xenophon can be usefully supplemented by the work of a number of authors who were active during the classical period (including Kritias, Aristophanes, Euripides, and Plato) and inscriptions, found at Sparta and dating from the classical period, which commemorate the achievements of individual athletes. There is, in addition, a small number of bronze statuettes, at least some of which were produced in Sparta, dating to the sixth and fifth centuries and depicting athletes or dancers. Literary sources from later periods may in some cases offer insight based on the idea that there

was significant continuity in the practice of Spartan athletics. The work of Plutarch is something of a special case. In the second century CE he wrote a detailed account of early Sparta drawing on numerous sources, most of which are now lost. Plutarch's account of Sparta is in many ways the most thorough one available to us, but it combines information from sources of widely variant dates without making allowance for change over time and presents an idealized picture.

Before proceeding, it will be helpful to settle on clear definitions of the terms 'sports' and 'athletics'. Scholars specializing in the study of sports have engaged in long and inconclusive debate about how to define the term 'sports'.³ A definition proposed by the sports historian Allen Guttman has the twin advantages of being lucid and helpful (Guttman (1978) 1–14). Guttman starts by differentiating between two kinds of play, spontaneous and organized. He labels organized play 'games' and identifies two kinds of games, noncompetitive and competitive. He assigns the term 'contests' to competitive games and finds two categories of contests, intellectual and physical. Sports are defined as physical contests. In the discussion that follows we will use Guttman's definition of sports, with one difference. Under the heading of sports we will also put physical activities that were directly based on sports or that were undertaken in preparation for competition. Sports thus include such things as someone throwing the discus on their own or informally with a few friends and someone lifting weights in order to throw the discus farther in competition. It should be specifically noted that horse racing was an important component of many Greek sports competitions (including the Olympics) and will be included in the discussion of Spartan sports. We will also look at choral dancing, which was an essential part of life in Sparta and was in many ways very similar to sports, not least because it was an intensely physical activity and frequently carried out competitively. The terms 'sports' and 'athletics', which are sometimes assigned different meanings, are used interchangeably throughout the rest of the text, simply for the sake of variety.

In discussing sports in Sparta, we will begin by exploring how a boy from a Spartiate family would have been introduced to sports and how he might have pursued them as he got older. The discussion that follows may in some places seem to take us rather far afield from athletics, but it is necessary to keep in mind that sports in Sparta were part of a highly organized educational and social system. We will then look at the participation of Spartan females in sports.

21.2 Spartan Sports in the Classical Period: Boys' and Men's Sports

Xenophon's *Lakedaimoniōn Politeia* includes a brief overview of the Spartan educational system as it existed in his time (2.1–5.9).⁴ Spartan boys entered training to be citizens and soldiers at age seven and in some sense continued in it for the rest of their lives. The sons of a Spartiate could not themselves become Spartiates unless they successfully completed a course of instruction defined and supervised by the state (*Lak. Pol.* 3.3). They were divided into three age groups, *paides* (approximately seven to fourteen years of age), *paidiskoi* (approximately ages fourteen to twenty), and *hēbōntes* (approximately ages twenty to thirty).

Xenophon provides little in the way of detailed information about the day-to-day operation of the Spartan educational system, but Jean Ducat (2006) has recently shown that it was probably similar in many respects to that found in other Greek communities. It is, therefore, possible to make cautious use of what we know about educational practice in Athens and elsewhere to help reconstruct what happened in Sparta.⁵

During their time as *paides*, boys from Spartiate families studied with private tutors hired by their families. In most times and places in ancient Greece, there was no publicly-funded educational system. Families that could afford to do so paid out of their own pockets to send their children, especially their sons, to teachers who worked with small groups of children. Boys typically studied with three different teachers: one for basic reading, writing, and mathematical skills; one for sports; and one for music.

Children learned sports from a tutor called a *paidotribēs* (plural *paidotribai*). Most of the events in which Spartan boys trained and competed were the same as those found elsewhere in ancient Greece. Those sports included running, the pentathlon, boxing, wrestling, and a combination of boxing and wrestling called *pankration*.

Dance was another significant element in the training given to Spartan boys. It was a regular and important part of life in ancient Greece, and Greeks showed a particular fondness for dancing in groups. A group of dancers, a chorus, could include males and females of all ages in various combinations and in various numbers up to about fifty. Choral performances typically included singing and were accompanied by music from a small harp (the lyre) or a flute. Dances were performed both casually and more formally at a wide variety of special occasions such as festivals and weddings.⁶ The children of most well-to-do Greek families regularly participated in choruses; the same was probably true of boys from Spartiate families. The playwright Pratinas, writing about 500, characterized the Spartans as 'cicadas, always eager for a chorus' (F4 Snell).

One of the most important Spartan religious festivals, the Gymnopaidiai, featured competitive choral dancing. This festival commemorated Spartan military victories and seems to have been built around a multi-day

competition of choruses which danced in the nude (the name of the festival means something like ‘nude dancing’) while singing songs composed by famous Spartan poets. It would appear that individual political units in the Spartan state (probably tribes or *ōbai*) entered at least one chorus in each of three different age groups: boys, youths, and men.⁷ The festival also included performances by choruses that included a mix of men, youths, and boys touting their past, present, and future prowess.

A significant shift in a boy’s existence occurred when he reached puberty and was moved from the *paides* to the next age group, the *paidiskoi*. Boys’ work with tutors seems to have ended at this point, and they began a tightly-controlled apprenticeship that prepared them to be citizens and soldiers. Boys continued to play sports on a regular basis, but they now did so in a more overtly competitive way and were encouraged to put their strength, aggression, and leadership qualities on display.

Once a boy became one of the *hēbōntes* his formal education was largely complete, but his involvement in sports did not diminish. Xenophon makes it clear that adult Spartiates were expected to participate regularly in sports. He writes that:

Once Lykourgos realized that those who keep in training develop good skin, firm flesh, and good health from their food, whereas the lazy look bloated, ugly, and weak, he did not overlook this matter either. But although he saw that anyone who trained hard of his own free will appeared to give his body sufficient exercise, he ordered that in the gymnasium the oldest man present should take care of everything, so that they never exercised less than the food they consumed required.⁸

(*Lak. Pol.* 4.8–9)

When discussing the regulations of the Spartan army, Xenophon points out that all Spartiates ‘are ordered by law to take exercise while they are on campaign’ and that they do so in the morning and evening prior to eating (*Lak. Pol.* 12.5–7).⁹

Physical contests and trials constituted a major component of the Spartan educational system as it existed in the classical period; their origin has long been a subject of debate. It has been recently and persuasively argued, most notably by Jean Ducat, that the Spartan educational system was constructed piecemeal over the course of the archaic period (700–480), based in part upon pre-existing customs, initiation rites in particular, with the goal of creating tough, skilled, and loyal citizen-soldiers. However, for much of the twentieth century many scholars believed that the Spartan educational system was for all intents and purposes a system of initiation rites that had been preserved and fossilized. Boys in most ancient Greek communities seem to have gone through initiation rituals around the ages of seventeen or eighteen, girls somewhere between twelve and fourteen. For boys, coming of age meant that

they were expected to begin serving as soldiers, for girls it meant that they were ready to get married. Initiation rites typically consist of three parts: separating the boys or girls to be initiated from their community, a period of transition, and reintegration into the community but with a new status.¹⁰ Physical activities such as athletic contests were a regular part of such rites in many parts of the Greek world.

The athletic contests associated with initiation rites were different from other Greek sports in that competitions for females seem to have been relatively common. Other than these rites, it was rare in most times and places in ancient Greece for females to be permitted to take part in sports. In addition, the program of events was limited to a single, short footrace, as opposed to other occasions when multiple events were held. Another interesting and important feature of these contests was that the participants often wore a special outfit or went nude. Before the sixth century, Greek athletes typically wore a loincloth, and athletic nudity was limited to athletic contests held as part of initiation rites. Anthropologists have found that special forms of dress are common in initiation rites all over the world. During the transition period those going through the ritual frequently wear some form of unusual clothing or go entirely nude to help mark it as something special and apart from everyday life. This probably has something to do with the remarkable fact that in the classical period Spartan male athletes, like their peers all over the Greek world, trained and competed in the nude. (It is in fact likely that the custom of exercising in the nude first emerged in Sparta (Thucydides 1.6; Christesen (2013)).

Some of Sparta's contests and trials were connected to ceremonies marking transitions from one age group to the next and took place in the sanctuary dedicated to the goddess Artemis Orthia. It seems that *paidiskoi* who were about to become *hēbōntes* participated in a ritual in which they tried to steal cheese from an altar in the Orthia sanctuary that was defended by *hēbōntes* with whips (*Lak. Pol.* 2.9).¹¹ In later periods, and possibly during the classical period as well, another contest associated with age-group transitions involved a ballgame called *sphairomachia*. This was played in teams and seems to have been something like a combination of football, rugby, and volleyball. Ballgames of various sorts were played informally all over ancient Greece. The Spartans were exceptional in having a formally organized and highly competitive team ballgame.¹² Xenophon makes it clear that adult male Spartiates also played this game with some regularity (*Lak. Pol.* 9.5).

During the classical period other physical contests may have been held in which all Spartiate boys participated (Kennell (1995) 28–9, 49–69, 115–42). Excavations at the Orthia sanctuary uncovered over one hundred stone slabs (*stēlai*) erected by individuals to commemorate victories won at contests held in the sanctuary. These *stēlai* typically feature an inscription that gives the victor's name, the name of the official in charge of the contests that year

(which located the victory in time), the contest won, and the victor's age. They also have cuttings in which were embedded the prize given to victors, an iron sickle. (The reason why sickles were given as prizes is unclear, but it seems they were regularly carried by young Spartiates who used them as a sort of multipurpose tool for such things as cutting food, and scraping oil and dirt from their skin after exercise.) Almost all of these *stēlai* date to the Roman period, but one comes from the middle of the fourth century. It has cuttings for five sickles and this inscription:

Victorious Arexippos dedicated these to Orthia, manifest for all in the gatherings of boys.

(IG 5.1.255, trans. N. Kennell)

Inscriptions on the *stēlai* from the Roman period attest to the existence of five different contests, most or all of which involved music and dancing. The five cuttings in Arexippos' *stēlai* may suggest those five contests were also held in some form in the classical period.

Spartan boys also participated in a rough team sport that was held on a small island at Sparta called Platanistas (the plane-tree grove). Two teams crossed bridges onto opposite sides of the island and then tried to drive each other into the water. Pausanias, who visited Sparta in the second century CE, writes that 'in fighting they strike, and kick, and bite, and gouge out each other's eyes. Thus they fight man against man. But they also charge in dense masses, and push each other into the water' (3.14.10, trans. J. Frazer, slightly modified). All the sources that refer to this sport come from the Roman period (Pausanias 3.14.8–10; 3.20.2; Lucian *Anacharsis* 38; Cicero *Tusculan Disputations* 5.27.77). However, a vague reference in Plato's *Laws* (633b) to training in Sparta that involved 'battles against each other using the hands' has been read by some scholars as a reference to what took place at Platanistas (Richer (2007) 238) and may indicate that this sport was also played during the classical period.

Spartiate boys and men who were talented and motivated athletes had a large number of opportunities to participate voluntarily in formally organized sports competitions that had no immediate connection to the Spartan educational system. Starting in the sixth century, communities all over the Greek world, including Sparta, founded athletic competitions that were held on a regular basis. These are sometimes called civic games by modern scholars to differentiate them from the contests held at major religious sanctuaries such as Olympia (Kyle (2007b) 74–5).

The program of events at civic competitions did not differ much from place to place. They typically had two parts, a *gymnikos agōn* ('the nude contest') and a *hippikos agōn* ('the equestrian contest'). The *gymnikos agōn* featured four different footraces as well as the pentathlon, wrestling, boxing, and *pankration*. There were footraces of the rough equivalents of 200 meters

(*stadion*), 400 meters (*diaulos*), and 8 kilometers (*dolichos*). There was also a race in which the competitors ran about 400 meters wearing a helmet and carrying a shield but were otherwise nude (*hoplitēs* or *hoplitodromos*). Pentathletes completed five separate events as part of a single contest: jumping, throwing the discus, throwing the javelin, wrestling, and the *stadion*. The *hippikos agōn* featured races for horses and chariot teams in various combinations of numbers and ages (Miller (2004a) 31–86, 129–49). Other than boxing and the *pankration* (on which, see further below), all of these events are known to have been contested in Sparta in the classical period.

During the classical period numerous athletic competitions were regularly held in and around Sparta. The Karneia festival, one of the most important events in the Spartan religious calendar, included athletic contests from an early date (Kennell (1995) 64–6; Miller (2004a) 146–9). We know about other, less prominent civic competitions held within the borders of the Spartan state primarily through dedications made by athletic victors starting in the sixth century. Those dedications usually took the form of inscribed *stēlai* that listed all of an athlete's victories. One of the most informative of these dedications was erected at the sanctuary of Athena Chalkioikos in the center of Sparta sometime around 400. It commemorates the successes of a man named Damonon and his son Enymakratidas in horse racing and athletic events in no less than nine different contests held in and around Sparta (IG 5.1.213; on this monument, see Hodkinson (2000) 303–7).

It is noteworthy that Spartiates during the classical period seem to have generally avoided competing in two events, boxing and *pankration* (Crowther (2004) 115–9; Hodkinson (1999) 157–60). The Spartans may have trained in these events. The legendary Spartan hero Polydeukes was considered by some Greeks to be the inventor of boxing (Philostratos *Gymnastikos* 9), and some myths feature Spartans boxing (e.g., Statius *Thebaid* 6.731–825). Sokrates in Plato's *Protagoras* states that people who want to imitate the Spartans take up boxing (342c, cf. *Gorgias* 515e), though this may reflect nothing more than a desire to imitate Spartans' penchant for rough-and-tumble sports of all kinds. More importantly, the records of Olympic victors, which show that Spartans won numerous victories in the *stadion*, *diaulos*, *dolichos*, pentathlon, and no less than sixteen victories in wrestling, contain no certain Spartan winners in either boxing or *pankration*. As Nigel Crowther has noted, 'clearly there was some kind of stigma attached to these events for the Spartans' ((2004) 117).

The reasons for Spartans' dislike for boxing and *pankration* are unclear. Plutarch states that Lykourgos prohibited Spartans competing in these events in order that they would not get used to surrendering (there were no rounds or points in boxing or *pankration* and competition continued until one of the competitors was unconscious or admitted defeat by raising his index finger) (*Moralia* 189e, cf. 228d; *Lykourgos* 19.4; Seneca *On Benefits* 5.3.1; Philostratos *Gymnastikos* 9, 58). The explanation offered by Plutarch is

probably nothing more than an invented rationalization. A more likely explanation is that Spartans, like some other Greeks, saw these events as being at best ineffective in training soldiers and at worst positively detrimental.

The very best Spartan athletes and horses went on to compete at the highest possible level, at the Panhellenic contests held at Olympia. There were four major athletic contests that attracted competitors from all over the Greek world: the Olympic, Pythian, Isthmian, and Nemean Games. All four Panhellenic games included athletic contests and horse racing, and musical competitions were held at the Pythian and Isthmian Games. The only prize given at these contests was a crown made from a tree or plant sacred to the patron deity of the sanctuary (no prizes were given for second or third place). At Olympia, for example, victors received a crown made from branches of a sacred olive tree. For this reason, these competitions are sometimes called crown games (Miller (2004a) 31–128).

Spartan athletes competed with great success at Olympia from an early date. Sometime around 400 a scholar named Hippias of Elis assembled as complete a list as he could of all previous Olympic victors. After Hippias' time a victor list was continuously maintained until the fifth century CE. No complete Olympic victor list has survived to our times, but we do know the names of about 25 percent of the people who won a victory in the *gymnikos agōn* or *hippikos agōn* at Olympia. Caution is required, because the information about Olympic victors down to about 400 BCE ultimately derives from the list compiled by Hippias, and there is some reason to think that there were gaps in his information about many early Olympiads (to about 580) and that he might have had political reasons to fill in those gaps with the names of Spartans – Sparta being the dominant power in Greece when he was writing. The figures on Olympic victors may, as a result, be somewhat distorted in favor of Sparta, but the basic patterns that emerge are almost certainly a good, if approximate, guide (Christesen (2007a) 45–160).

Spartan athletes were a dominating presence in the *gymnikos agōn* at Olympia until the early sixth century, after which time they continued to compete for centuries, but with much less success (see [Table 21.1](#)). This phenomenon has occasioned much scholarly comment (Hodkinson (1999) 160–5). Broadly speaking, two, non-mutually-exclusive explanations have been put forward. It may have been the result of major reforms put in place in Sparta during the archaic period. The precise nature and date of those reforms remains unclear (see Van Wees in the present work, Volume I, [Chapter 8](#)), but Spartan society did change in significant ways during the seventh and sixth centuries. It is possible that Sparta moved toward a higher degree of militarization and that athletics were intentionally de-emphasized because they were felt to be an impediment to, or distraction from, military training (Nafissi (1991) 162–72).

Table 21.1 Numbers and percentages of known Spartan victors at the Olympic Games.

<i>Date range</i>	<i>Known Spartan victors</i>	<i>Known victors from other Greek communities</i>	<i>Percentage of known victors that were Spartan</i>
Olympiads 1–25 (776–680)	<i>gymnikos</i> : 7 <i>hippikos</i> : 0	<i>gymnikos</i> : 25 <i>hippikos</i> : 1	<i>gymnikos</i> : 22% <i>hippikos</i> : 0%
Olympiads 26–50 (676–580)	<i>gymnikos</i> : 36 <i>hippikos</i> : 0	<i>gymnikos</i> : 17 <i>hippikos</i> : 4	<i>gymnikos</i> : 68% <i>hippikos</i> : 0%
Olympiads 51–75 (576–480)	<i>gymnikos</i> : 3 <i>hippikos</i> : 5	<i>gymnikos</i> : 85 <i>hippikos</i> : 22	<i>gymnikos</i> : 3% <i>hippikos</i> : 19%
Olympiads 76–100 (476–380)	<i>gymnikos</i> : 4 <i>hippikos</i> : 11	<i>gymnikos</i> : 142 <i>hippikos</i> : 22	<i>gymnikos</i> : 3% <i>hippikos</i> : 33%
Olympiads 101–125 (376–280)	<i>gymnikos</i> : 4 <i>hippikos</i> : 1	<i>gymnikos</i> : 93 <i>hippikos</i> : 19	<i>gymnikos</i> : 4% <i>hippikos</i> : 5%
Olympiads 126–150 (276–180)	<i>gymnikos</i> : 2 <i>hippikos</i> : 0	<i>gymnikos</i> : 58 <i>hippikos</i> : 11	<i>gymnikos</i> : 3% <i>hippikos</i> : 0%
Olympiads 151–175 (176–80)	<i>gymnikos</i> : 1 <i>hippikos</i> : 0	<i>gymnikos</i> : 50 <i>hippikos</i> : 7	<i>gymnikos</i> : 2% <i>hippikos</i> : 0%
Olympiads 176–200 (76 BCE–21 CE)	<i>gymnikos</i> : 1 <i>hippikos</i> : 0	<i>gymnikos</i> : 49 <i>hippikos</i> : 19	<i>gymnikos</i> : 2% <i>hippikos</i> : 0%
Olympiads 201–225 (25–121 CE)	<i>gymnikos</i> : 1 <i>hippikos</i> : 0	<i>gymnikos</i> : 62 <i>hippikos</i> : 10	<i>gymnikos</i> : 2% <i>hippikos</i> : 0%
Olympiads 226–250 (125–221 CE)	<i>gymnikos</i> : 1 <i>hippikos</i> : 0	<i>gymnikos</i> : 63 <i>hippikos</i> : 4	<i>gymnikos</i> : 2% <i>hippikos</i> : 0%
Olympiads 251–287 (225–369 CE)	<i>gymnikos</i> : 1 <i>hippikos</i> : 0	<i>gymnikos</i> : 11 <i>hippikos</i> : 1	<i>gymnikos</i> : 8% <i>hippikos</i> : 0%

Another possibility is that Spartans were less successful at Olympia after the early sixth century because they encountered much stiffer competition. In the *Politics* Aristotle argues that Spartans succeeded in both sports and war in earlier periods because they regularly trained while their opponents did not (1338b25–9). There is much to be said for the view put forward by Aristotle, an acute observer of Greek athletics (he compiled the first list of victors at the Pythian Games and an updated version of the Olympic victor list). There was an explosion of athletic activity in Greece in the first half of the sixth century, as many more men took up the habit of regular participation in sports (Christesen (2007b)). At the same time, Olympia began to attract athletes from a wider range of places in the Greek world, and some Greek

communities in Sicily and southern Italy made a concerted effort to produce a large number of top-flight athletes in the hope of gaining prestige from Olympic victories (Young (1984) 131–41).¹³

A related factor may have been that limitations on the participation of Spartans in contests held outside Sparta diminished their ability to produce star athletes. Spartiates were expected to dedicate themselves to active participation in the social and political life shared by the *homoioi* and were discouraged (and, at some points in their education, prohibited) from leaving Sparta. This is reflected in the fact that there are no Spartans included in the more than 600 known victors in the *gymnikoi agōnes* at the Pythian, Isthmian, and Nemean Games (Scanlon (2002) 78–81). Spartans, in short, do not seem to have regularly participated in athletic contests outside of Sparta other than the Olympics.¹⁴ The number of regularly-scheduled athletic contests in the Greek world increased sharply from the sixth century, and in the classical period many successful athletes from other Greek communities traveled regularly to take part in both Panhellenic and civic competitions. It was difficult for Spartiates to do that sort of traveling, which may in turn have deprived the best Spartan athletes of the experience of regularly encountering high-level competition and thus made it difficult for them to succeed at the Olympics. This could have had significant results because individual athletes often won in multiple events over multiple Olympiads and were responsible for a substantial fraction of the total number of Olympic victories won by their community as a whole. For example, twenty of the forty-three known Spartan victories in the *gymnikos agōn* at Olympia between 776 and 580 were won by just four athletes.¹⁵ Whatever interpretation one adopts, it is fairly clear that Spartan athletes were much less successful at Olympia after the early sixth century than they had been before.

There is another obvious pattern in the records of Spartan Olympic victors: Spartiates enjoyed almost improbable success in the four-horse chariot race at Olympia for a span of about seventy-five years starting in the middle of the fifth century. Spartiates won the four-horse chariot race at Olympia in 448, 444, 440, 432, 428, 424, 420, 396, 392, and 388.¹⁶ Reflecting on their successes at Olympia, Pausanias remarked that after the Persian Wars (490–479) the Spartans ‘were keener breeders of horses than all the rest of the Greeks’ (6.2.1, trans. J. Frazer).

The rise and fall of Sparta as a dominant player in Olympic chariot racing had to do in large part with money. Horse racing, particularly chariot racing, was a proverbially expensive activity (Aristophanes *Clouds* 1–118; Isokrates 16.33). Stephen Hodkinson ((2000) 303–33) has tied the beginnings of Spartiate success in chariot racing at Olympia to a concentration in wealth that came about due to a massive earthquake that hit Sparta c.464. This earthquake resulted in huge loss of life, and a number of people seem to have suddenly inherited a great deal of property. Some of those people used their newly-

acquired riches to race chariots. Spartiate success in Olympic chariot-racing dried up rather suddenly in the first half of the fourth century; there is not a single known victory by a Spartan in this activity after 368. The primary reason for this striking development was probably economic. The devastating defeat inflicted on the Spartans at Leuktra in 371 led almost immediately thereafter to the loss of Messenia, which reduced the territory of the Spartan state by nearly half. The resulting, massive loss of wealth in Sparta, along with continuing military pressure from external enemies, made it much more difficult to find the resources to lavish on chariot racing.

Spartan success in Olympic chariot racing, however, was as much about motivation as money. Except on rare occasions, the owners of race horses did not themselves participate directly on the track; instead they watched from the sidelines. Nonetheless, it was owners, and not chariot drivers or jockeys, who were proclaimed victors and who enjoyed the fruits of success. Spartans who were victorious in either the *gymnikos agōn* and *hippikos agōn* at local competitions or at the Olympics were treated with great respect by their peers, both while they were alive and after they died (Hodkinson (1999) 167–70). Spartiate Olympic victors were evidently given the right to fight alongside the Spartan kings in battle (*Lykourgos* 22.4, cf. *Moralia* 639e). The Spartan Olympic victor Lakrates received special care when he was interred after being killed in a battle near Athens. A few, spectacularly successful, Spartan Olympic victors literally became objects of worship. In considering this phenomenon it is important to keep in mind that Greeks worshiped literally thousands of figures, some of whom were considered to be gods and some of whom were humans believed to have become semi-divine. Spartans worshiped the Olympic victors Hipposthenes, Hetoimokles, and Chionis (and possibly others).¹⁷

At least some Spartiates who won chariot-racing victories at Olympia seem to have been given important diplomatic and military posts in part due to their successes on the track. Stephen Hodkinson has persuasively argued that ‘a chariot victory could help a man to leapfrog above his former status into positions of leadership he would not otherwise have gained’ ((2000) 326). While this may seem odd, we need to keep in mind that Greeks believed that Olympic victors of all kinds had a special aura with overtones of divinity (Kurke (1993)), and to compare the ability of prominent athletes of today to turn the status they earn from their play on the field to their advantage off it.

Given the status-generating effects of athletic success, it should come as no surprise that even those Spartan athletes who had won in less high profile contests than the Olympics were eager to advertise their successes. There were, however, either *de iure* or *de facto* limits on the commemoration in Sparta of successes in sports contests (Hodkinson (1999) 152–76, (2000) 317–23). Those limits enshrined a strong differentiation between victories won at Olympia and those won elsewhere, and between victories won in the

gymnikos agōn and those won in the *hippikos agōn*.

Numerous commemorative monuments dating to the late archaic and classical periods and celebrating successes in local athletic competitions have been found in and around Sparta. Most, if not all, were probably originally erected as dedications in religious sanctuaries, especially those of Athena Chalkioikos on the acropolis of Sparta and of Apollo at Amyklai (just south of Sparta). A considerable fraction of these dedications take the form of stone slabs carrying inscriptions that detail an athlete's successes. We have already had occasion to discuss the best-known example of this type of monument, that erected by Damonon and his son Enymakratidas around 400. Other, functionally similar pieces include bronze figurines of athletes, stone weights used in the long jump, a bronze discus, and a life-size relief sculpture of a discus thrower.

It was not until the fourth century, however, that the successes of still-living Olympic victors were commemorated in Sparta. Spartan athletes who were heroized received monuments, but only after their death. The earliest known monuments erected in Sparta to celebrate a still-living Olympic victor date to the fourth century. A fragment of a Doric capital bearing Kyniska's name was found in the excavations at Sparta (*IG* 5.1.235); this capital may have originally been part of a dedication that celebrated Kyniska's successes at Olympia in 396 and 392 (Hodkinson (2000) 328; for more on Kyniska see later below, and Millender this volume, [Chapter 19](#)). The first victor in the *gymnikos agōn* at Olympia known to have a monument at Sparta in his own lifetime was Deinosthenes, who won the *stadion* in 316 (Pausanias 6.16.8).

Victors in the *hippikos agōn*, either in local contests or at Olympia, faced even tighter restrictions. Of the numerous dedications by athletic victors found at Sparta and dating to the period before the fourth century, only one, the Damonon *stēlē*, highlights horse-racing victories.¹⁸ Damonon may have been able to erect his monument because he was very atypical in having driven his own chariots and ridden his own horses to victory. In this sense his accomplishments were like those of victors in the *gymnikos agōn* in being demonstrations of superior physical abilities (Hodkinson (2000) 305–6). Virtually all of the Spartiate victors in Olympic chariot racing, starting in the middle of the sixth century, erected expensive commemorative monuments, but at Olympia rather than Sparta. The restrictions that applied in Sparta evidently did not carry over to Olympia.

No ancient source provides any information about the reasons for these limits on the commemoration of athletic success, but it likely had to do with the heavy emphasis Spartiates placed on military service and the dangers inherent in the status-generating effects of victories in sports contests. A certain number of Spartiates (and other Greeks) felt that too much respect was accorded to athletes (Golden (1998) 162–9; Kyle (1987) 124–54). The Spartan poet Tyrtaios, in a poem composed in the seventh century, clearly

voices his opinion that a great athlete who was not a great soldier merited no special treatment (F12, ll. 1–14). The fact that Tyrtaios goes out of his way to express his disagreement with the practice of according status to successful athletes indicates that such practice was the norm. Similarly, Plutarch preserves a (probably fictional) story about a Spartan mother who, upon hearing that her son had been mortally wounded in battle, remarked, ‘How much more noble ... to be victorious on the field of battle and meet death, than to win at the Olympic Games and live!’ (*Moralia* 242b, trans. F. Babbitt). Another issue was that the prestige that came with successes in sports created significant inequalities in social standing. Olympic victors enjoyed special prestige and a vague aura of sanctity that greatly exceeded anything that could be won from a victory in a local contest. There may have been a feeling that it was a potential threat to the (notionally) egalitarian relationship between Spartiates, who were supposedly *homoioi*, to allow an Olympic victor to increase his already very considerable standing in the community by erecting a commemorative monument. Victories in the *hippikos agōn* were probably a particularly sensitive matter, because owners of race horses typically hired chariot drivers or jockeys and did not directly compete themselves. Victories in horse racing were thus more than anything else a matter of money, not a measure of personal physical prowess.

21.3 Spartan Sports in the Classical Period: Girls’ Sports

Unmarried Spartan girls were like their counterparts elsewhere in the Greek world in that they danced in choruses with some frequency but were very unusual in that they also regularly took part in sports. Their participation in both activities seems to have fallen off sharply or ceased entirely upon marriage. In exploring this subject it is important to keep in mind that the ‘evidence for Greek female athletics remains meagre compared to the abundant and ubiquitous evidence for males’ (Kyle (2007a) 132). Furthermore, the sports activities of Spartan females were sufficiently unusual as to excite a great deal of comment, much of it uninformed or exaggerated or both. No less important, all of the extant textual evidence was produced by males, so we have no way of knowing what Spartan females thought of their own physical activities.¹⁹

Choral dancing was believed to prepare girls for marriage by fostering grace and beauty that made them desirable. This is perhaps most apparent from the work of Alkman, who wrote songs for choruses of unmarried girls. Alkman’s poetry, originally composed around 600, remained popular for centuries and so was known in Sparta in the classical period. The best preserved of his poems (F1) features a description of two girls named Hagesichora and Agido,

both of whom are remarkable for their beauty.²⁰

In most ancient Greek communities opportunities for females to play sports were limited to initiation rites in which they took part at most a few times before marriage. A good example of an athletic competition that formed part of an initiation rite can be found in the Heraia Games, which were held in the stadium at Olympia. (Other than using the Olympic stadium, the Heraia Games do not seem to have had any connection with the Olympics.) Our main source of information about these games is Pausanias, who tells us that they consisted of one event, a footrace for unmarried girls, with the girls running in three different age groups (5.16.2–6). The girls wore an unusual outfit, a short tunic that left their right breast bare. A marble statue now in the Vatican museum at Rome shows a girl running in just this outfit; it is probably a copy of a bronze original from around 460 that served as a victory monument. This kind of tunic was normally worn not by girls, who dressed much more modestly, but by male laborers.²¹

In Sparta, on the other hand, females from Spartiate families regularly participated in sports. One of the basic points Xenophon seeks to establish in his *Lakedaimoniōn Politeia* is that Spartan customs were fundamentally different from those found in other Greek communities. The first piece of evidence he produces to make his case is the treatment of females. He states that females in Sparta are given a better diet than those in other Greek communities and, instead of being expected to sit quietly and weave clothes, are required to exercise regularly:

Lykourgos believed that ... the most important task for freeborn women was to bear children. First, therefore, he ordered that the female sex should exercise their bodies no less than the male. Second, he established contests in running and strength for women just as for men, thinking that the offspring of two strong partners would also be more vigorous.

(1.4)

Three other, slightly earlier, sources also highlight what was to most Greeks the strikingly odd participation of Spartan females in sports. Kritias, an Athenian author and politician who died in 403, also wrote a work called the *Lakedaimoniōn Politeia*, which survives only in fragments. One of those fragments mentions Spartan females exercising in order to produce stronger children (F32). Kritias was notably fond of things Spartan, so he likely saw nothing wrong with females, in Sparta at least, being physically active. The Athenian playwright Euripides does not seem to have shared Kritias' views on this subject. One of his plays, the *Andromache*, was first produced around 425 and is set in the era of the Trojan War. It includes an exchange in which Achilles' father Peleus attributes Helen's willingness to run off to Troy with Paris to the way in which Spartan females were raised:

Not even if she wanted could a Spartan girl be chaste. They leave their

houses in the company of young men, with bare thighs and loosened tunics, and in a fashion I cannot stand they share the same running-tracks (*dromoi*) and wrestling places (*palaistrai*) with them. After that is it any wonder that you do not bring up women to be chaste? You should ask Helen this question: she left your house behind ... and went off on a revel with a young man to another country.²²

(Il. 595–604, trans. D. Kovacs)

About a decade later another Athenian playwright, Aristophanes, made the physical training of Spartan females into a subject of comedy in the *Lysistrata*. When the Athenian Lysistrata first encounters a Spartan female named Lampito, she remarks on her physical fitness ('your body looks ... strong enough to choke a bull'), and Lampito replies that she exercises and dances regularly (Il. 76–82; see also Millender, this volume, [Chapter 19](#)).

There can be little doubt, then, that females from Spartiate families were expected to participate in sports. This seems to have included both exercise and competition since Xenophon clearly states that Lykourgos required Spartan females to train their bodies (*sōmaskein*) and that he set up competitions (*agōnes*) in running and strength (cf. Plutarch *Agēsilaos* 21.3). Most of those competitions must have been in Sparta itself, but Sarah Pomeroy has argued that the majority of participants in the Heraia at Olympia were Spartans (Pomeroy (2002) 26, cf. Scanlon (2002) 115). This is possible but little more than a conjecture since there is no direct evidence for Spartan girls taking part in those games.

It would appear that Spartan females stopped playing sports after they were married. The relevant evidence, as might be expected, is ambiguous. Xenophon, when writing on exercise, uses a generic term meaning 'female' and not any of the various words that indicated a female's marital status. However, since both he and Kritias directly connect exercise to motherhood, the implication is that Spartan females continued to play sports after they married. In addition, Lampito in the *Lysistrata* is married, though that is required by the plot of the play and may not mean very much. The kind of sports Spartan females played might also be relevant. Whereas Kritias and Aristophanes mention only sports in general terms, Euripides and Xenophon both state that Spartan females ran and wrestled (this is the most likely reading of Xenophon's 'contests of strength', cf. Cicero *Tusculan Disputations* 2.15.36; Lucian *Judgment of the Goddesses* 14). Plato recommends that girls in one of his ideal states (which were inspired in part by Sparta) take part in contests in running, armed combat (which Plato specifically prescribes as a substitute for wrestling), and, if they wish, horsemanship (*Laws* 833c–4d). Theocritus (18.22–25, third century), Pausanias (3.13.7), Philostratos (*Gymnastikos* 27, third century CE), and Hesychius (s.v. Drionas, fifth century CE) refer to Spartan females running. Some of the later sources give a slightly different picture. Plutarch states that

Spartan females participated in running, wrestling, and throwing the discus and javelin (*Lykourgos* 14.2, *Moralia* 227d), and Propertius talks about Spartan females engaging in the *pankration*, boxing, and throwing the discus (3.14.1–10, first century BCE). These statements have attracted a considerable amount of scholarly attention, but, whatever one's opinion about their reliability, they cannot be blithely applied to the classical period. The earliest and best evidence thus indicates that Spartan females primarily engaged in running and wrestling. As we have seen, athletic contests associated with initiation rites typically included only footraces, which suggests that Spartan females regularly played sports beyond those found in initiation rites (which were open only to unmarried girls). This might be taken to mean that married women participated in sports.

On the other hand, much evidence suggests that only unmarried girls took part in sports in Sparta. Euripides uses a word for unmarried girl in describing Spartan female athletes, as do virtually all of the pertinent later sources (Cicero, Hesychius, Philostratos, Plutarch, Propertius, Plutarch, and Theocritus (all cited above), as well as Nicolaus of Damascus *FGrH* 90 F103 Z144.4, Suidas *s.v.* *Lykourgos*).

Plato offers further evidence that only unmarried girls participated in sports in Sparta. One of the characters in the *Laws*, in discussing the treatment of women in the ideal state they are sketching, implies, but does not explicitly state, that girls (*korai*) but not married women (*gynaikes*) engage in sports and choral dancing (806a). Later in the same work the same character suggests a set of athletic contests for females organized as follows:

In the case of females, we shall hold the *stadion*, *diaulos*, *ephippios* (a race double the length of the *diaulos*), and the *dolichos* for girls (*korai*) under the age of puberty, who shall be nude and shall race on the track itself; and girls over thirteen shall continue to take part until married, up to the age of twenty at most, or at least eighteen; but these, when they come forward and compete in these races, must be modestly dressed.

(833d, trans. R. Bury, slightly modified)

Here, in this Spartan-influenced passage, marriage clearly terminates participation in sports.

The specific contexts in which Spartan females played sports also suggest that only unmarried girls participated. There are some indications that Spartan girls were expected to go through a state-supervised educational system organized roughly along the same lines as the one for boys, and such a system, based on what we know about boys' activities, may well have included playing sports (Ducat (2006) 223–47). However, girls would have finished their education before they were married and may well therefore have stopped participating in sports. In addition, there was an overt ritual component in some of the sports activities of Spartan females, which suggests

a connection to initiation rites that were open only to unmarried girls. Theocritus mentions a group of 240 unmarried Spartan girls running races that were in some way connected to the worship of Helen as a divine figure (18.22–5). Pausanias describes a cult site at which was held a footrace for girls that seems to have been an initiatory rite of some sort (3.13.7).

The way which Spartan females dressed for sports points in the same direction. Greek females tended to dress in a modest fashion, but Spartan females were famed throughout Greece for wearing very little when they danced in choruses or played sports. The sixth-century poet Ibykos called Spartan women ‘thigh-flashers’ (F58 Page). We have already seen a character in one of Euripides’ plays complaining that Spartan girls leave their homes ‘with bare thighs and loosened tunics’ on their way to run and wrestle. A particularly murky passage in the *Dissoi Logoi*, a philosophical treatise by an unknown author which probably dates to around 400 (Robinson (1979) 34–41), seems to say that Spartan girls while exercising did not wear their normal clothing, which covered their shoulders and arms (Diels-Kranz 2.90.9; cf. Sophocles F872; Aelius Dionysius s.v. *dōriazein*; Pollux 7.55).

We are fortunate in this case to have material evidence that echoes the literary sources, in the form of roughly forty bronze statuettes and handles for mirrors and for ritual vessels. At least some of these pieces seem to have been produced in or around Sparta in the sixth and fifth centuries (Scanlon (2002) 127–37; Stewart (1997) 108–18). All of these pieces show young women who probably represent dancers or athletes. Some of the figures carry items associated with choral dancing (such as a flute or cymbals) and sports (flasks to hold oil, which Greek athletes applied to their skin before exercise, and sickles or strigils, which Greeks used to scrape dirt and oil from the skin after exercise). More than half of the figures are completely nude, but some wear shorts or a short tunic.

There is no simple answer to the question of what these bronzes mean for our understanding of Spartan athletic practice. It is possible that on at least some occasions Spartan females played sports in the nude, as was customary for Spartan males. The female Guardians in Plato’s *Republic* exercise in the nude (457a). Theocritus refers to Spartan female athletes coated in oil (18.23), which was typically associated with athletic nudity. Immediately after discussing the athletic habits of unmarried Spartan girls, Plutarch states that Lykourgos made special forms of dress customary for them when they participated in processions (*Lykourgos* 14.2–4). This passage presents difficulties because Plutarch describes only the dress of Spartan girls in processions, not while playing sports, and the words he uses (*gymnai*, *gymnōsis*) can be taken to mean either nude or unusually lightly clothed. Two Roman writers, Propertius (3.14.1–4) and Ovid (*Heroides* 16.149–52), explicitly mention Spartan females exercising in the nude (cf. Lucian *Judgment of the Goddesses* 14), but the evidentiary value of their work is

diminished by their late date, distance from the subject, and poetic nature.²³

The most likely interpretation is that Spartan females usually exercised and danced wearing short tunics, as indicated by the earliest relevant sources, Ibykos and Euripides. This outfit is shown on some of the bronzes discussed above, including a statuette dating to c.500 (for photograph see [Figure 19.1](#)). At some points in their lives or on some special occasions Spartan females participating in sports may have gone completely nude, like their male counterparts. Recall that some Greek initiation rites entailed athletic nudity, and that Plato recommends that girls compete in sports in the nude up to age thirteen then do so dressed modestly until they are married or turn twenty.

The outfit worn by Spartan female athletes likely has some significance in regard to the question of whether married Spartan women participated in sports. There is an obvious similarity between that outfit and the one associated with athletic contests linked to initiation rites such as the Heraia at Olympia. Moreover, having girls perform choral dances and sports wearing relatively little was intended at least in part to attract potential suitors (see above, cf. Plato *Republic* 458d), something which was not relevant to married women. These considerations suggest that sports were only open to unmarried girls at Sparta.

The extant evidence does not, in the final analysis, permit any ironclad conclusions, but it seems likely that married Spartan women rarely if at all played sports.²⁴ Many of the literary sources, the contexts in which Spartan females played sports, and the way they dressed for sports all indicate that only unmarried girls took part. Possibly most significant is that there is relatively abundant evidence for unmarried Spartan girls dancing in choruses but little evidence for choruses made up of married Spartan women (Calame (1997) 26–30; Plato *Laws* 806a). This is significant given the relatively close connections between sports and dancing. The termination of Spartan girls' participation in sports upon marriage represented a significant limitation. Spartan girls married later than was the case in most other Greek communities (at age eighteen to twenty instead of thirteen to fourteen), but nonetheless their time as athletes was necessarily sharply circumscribed.

A relevant question is the extent to which Spartan girls trained and competed with boys. The evidence that Spartan girls and boys exercised together or competed against each other is minimal. In Plato's *Republic* Sokrates recommends that both men and women among the Guardians regularly exercise, and he states that they will desire to procreate with each other because they will be 'commingled in physical training and in all their life and education' (458d, trans. P. Shorey, cf. 452b). Ovid envisages Spartan girls exercising in the nude 'mingled with nude men' (*Heroides* 16.152). Neither of these sources can be taken as offering reliable insight into Spartan athletic practice, particularly since all the other relevant sources make no mention of the 'commingling' of male and female Spartan athletes.

The provisional conclusion that Spartan females and males did not play sports together is reinforced by what we know about the places where they exercised. Peleus in Euripides' *Andromache* is upset because Spartan girls 'share the same running-racks (*dromoi*) and wrestling-places (*palaistrai*)'. A *palaistra* was a building used for training in wrestling, boxing, and *pankration* and was typically square with an inner courtyard surrounded on all four sides by colonnades. In some cases *palaistrai* were stand-alone structures, in other cases they formed part of a larger athletic complex called a *gymnasion*. *Gymnasia* first appeared in the sixth century and seem to have been quite simple initially, consisting of an open space with a track, a few small buildings to hold clothing and equipment, and probably an enclosure wall. Over the course of time the architectural component became increasingly elaborate and typically included a *palaistra* and indoor and outdoor tracks (Glass (1988)). Spartan males throughout Sparta's history all seem to have exercised at a single place called the *dromos*, which Pausanias visited and described (3.14.6). This was a large, open area that in Pausanias' time held two separate gymnasia. Its exact location is unknown, but Pausanias' account places it in the western or southwestern part of the city (Delorme (1960) 72–4; Sanders 2009). That is somewhat problematic because there are references to Spartans exercising near the Eurotas River, which formed the eastern border of the city. A play of Euripides contains a reference to 'gymnasia by the reedy Eurotas' (*Helen* 208–10) in which Castor and Polydeukes once exercised, Aristophanes mentions unmarried girls dancing alongside the Eurotas (*Lysistrata* 1308–10), and Theocritus describes unmarried Spartan girls running races alongside the Eurotas (18.22–4). It is possible that the Eurotas is used metonymically in some or all of these passages, that Pausanias' (admittedly rather opaque) description of the *dromos* has been misinterpreted, or that Spartan females and males usually exercised in different spaces, with the females near the Eurotas and the males at the *dromos*. The last of these three possibilities seems the most probable. There were possibly some special occasions when girls and boys danced or played sports in the same place, particularly since Plutarch claims that Lykourgos accustomed unmarried girls 'at certain festivals to dance and sing when the young men were present as spectators' (*Lykourgos* 14.3, trans. B. Perrin). That still leaves the reference in the *Andromache* to Spartan girls and boys sharing *dromoi* and *palaistrai*, which may be attributed to either hyperbole or ignorance on the part of Euripides.

The one sports activity in which married Spartan women were probably permitted to take part, albeit indirectly, was horse racing. The first female victor at Olympia was in fact a Spartan by the name of Kyniska, who was the sister of Agesilaos (born 444, died 360), one of Sparta's most famous kings. Kyniska achieved an Olympic victory by means of ownership of a four-horse chariot. Females were not allowed to take part in the *gymnikos agōn* at Olympia and may even have been banned from attending the Olympics as

spectators (Kyle (2007a) 135–41). However, since chariots were not raced by their owners but by hired drivers, it was possible for a woman to enter and win an Olympic chariot race. This did not, however, actually happen until Kyniska's victories at Olympia in 396 and again in 392. Kyniska set an example that was later followed by other Spartan women, including Euryleonis, who won an Olympic victory in the two-horse chariot race in the middle of the fourth century (Pausanias 3.8.1, 3.17.6). The primary complication is that there is no evidence that either Kyniska or Euryleonis was ever married. That does not mean much since we know very little about individual Spartan women, and it seems improbable, though not impossible, that none of the Spartan women who owned race horses were married.

Kyniska became a figure of some note and remains a subject of debate. She erected two separate monuments at Olympia to celebrate her successes (Pausanias 5.12.5, 6.1.6; *IvO* 160). Pausanias saw these monuments and commented that:

Kyniska ... was exceedingly ambitious to succeed at the Olympic games and was the first woman to breed horses and the first to win an Olympic victory. After Kyniska other women, chiefly Spartan, have won Olympic victories, but none of them was more famous for her victories than she.

(3.8.1, trans. J. Frazer)

Even more remarkably, Kyniska was heroized in Sparta after her death (Pausanias 3.15.1). Scholars up to the present day have debated what motivated Agesilaos and Kyniska, and the extent to which Kyniska acted independently of her brother. Some scholars have seen her as a pawn manipulated by her brother for his own reasons, while others have seen her as a woman knowledgeable about horse racing and ambitious to succeed at the highest level of competition (Kyle (2003); Pomeroy (2002) 21–4).²⁵ Unfortunately, as Ellen Millender has noted, 'the archaeological and epigraphic sources for Kyniska ... provide no definitive evidence for either her subservience to Agesilaos' agenda or her own aspirations' ((2009) 26, and this volume, [Chapter 19](#)).

21.4 Conclusion

To be a Spartiate was to be an athlete and a dancer. Sports and choral dancing were two of the basic activities around which the lives of Spartiates of all ages were constructed and which helped bind them together as a group. This is apparent in the way Spartiates spent their time, and also in the way Spartiates who failed in their duties were treated. Xenophon notes that:

Lykourgos made it clear that happiness was the reward of the brave,

misery the reward of cowards. For whenever someone proves a coward in other cities, he has only the bad reputation of being a coward, but the coward goes to the same public places as the brave and takes his seat and joins in physical exercise, as he likes. But in Sparta everyone would be ashamed to accept a coward as a messmate or as an opponent in a wrestling match. Frequently such a man is not picked when they select teams for ballgames, and in choruses he is relegated to the most ignominious positions.

(*Lak. Pol.* 9.3–5; cf. Nicolaus of Damascus *FGrH* 90 F103 Z144.12)

A man who was a coward had violated one of the most essential norms of Spartiates. This violation was punished by exclusion from the community of Spartiates and that exclusion took the form of being left out of wrestling and ballgames and being put in the least honorable spots in choruses. The fact that cowards were punished by exclusion from sports shows just how important sport was to the identity of Spartiates, and, to a lesser extent, of unmarried girls from Spartan families. In thinking about ancient Sparta, we must, therefore, keep sports and choral dancing in the foreground.

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FURTHER READING

For good general introductions to sports in ancient Greece, see Kyle 2007b and Miller 2004a. A collection of ancient sources on Greek athletics in English translation can be found in Miller 2004b. There is at present no complete treatment of sports in Sparta. Stephen Hodkinson has written seminal pieces on athletic competition by Spartiates (other than horse racing, (1999)) and on horse racing in Sparta ((2000) 303–33). The Spartan educational system, which included a great deal of sports activity, is ably treated in Ducat 2006 and Kennell 1995. The initiatory aspects of Spartan athletics are highlighted in Scanlon 2002, 121–37. A survey of what is known about female sports in the ancient Greek world can be found in Arrigoni 1985 (in Italian). The socio-political dimensions of Spartan athletics are explored in Christesen (2013), and also in Christesen and Kyle (2013). There is at present no single, thorough, up-to-date treatment in English of dance in ancient Greece. The relationship between dance and education is ably discussed in Griffith 2001. A more wide-ranging examination of dance in ancient Greece can be found in a series of books in French by Marie-Hélène Delavaud-Roux (1993, 1994, 1995).

NOTES

- 1 All dates are BCE unless otherwise indicated. The scholiast to Theocritus 18.22 states that it was the custom for females from Sparta from both non-Spartiate and Spartiate families to exercise like men. The terms he uses (*Lakainai*, *Spartiatides*) probably should be taken to refer to females from perioikic and Spartiate families and not helots. (See Arrigoni (1985) 74–5.) This source is, however, both late and exceptional.
- 2 For an introduction to, English translation of, and commentary on Xenophon's *Lakedaimoniōn Politeia*, see Lipka (2002).
- 3 On the difficulties in defining the term 'sports', see the articles collected in Holowchak (2002) 7–98.

- 4 Xenophon's account is, however, by no means complete or without its difficulties. For detailed scholarly explorations of the Spartan educational system, see Ducat (2006) and Kennell (1995). The discussion found here is based in large part on Xenophon and Ducat.
- 5 On education in ancient Greek communities other than Sparta, see Joyal, McDougall and Yardley (2009) and Marrou (1956).
- 6 On choral dancing in ancient Greece, see Griffith (2001) and the bibliography cited therein. Spartans, both boys and girls, also did at least some individual dancing, some of it competitive. One dance in particular, *bibasis*, was strongly associated with Sparta. It involved jumping up and touching the buttocks with the heels (Aristophanes *Lysistrata* 81–2, Pollux 4.102; Oribasios *Collectiones Medicae Reliquiae* 6.31). On Lampito, see Millender, this volume, [Chapter 19](#).
- 7 The sources on the Gymnopaideiai present numerous interpretive difficulties. See Ducat (2006) 265–74, Pettersson (1992) 42–56, and Richer 2005.
- 8 All translations from Xenophon's *Lakedaimoniōn Politeia* are taken from Lipka (2002), in some cases with small changes to make the sense of the original Greek more obvious.
- 9 How far athletics were or were not effective preparation for warfare was a contested subject among the Greeks themselves, and the debate continues among scholars today. See, for example, Poliakoff (1987), 94–103, Reed (1998), and Spivey (2004) 1–29.
- 10 There is no good single book in English on initiation rites in ancient Greece. The best starting places are Graf, and Kamen (2007).
- 11 This rite evolved significantly over the course of time, and by the Roman period had become a bloody spectator sport. Plutarch (*Lykourgos* 18.2) claims to have seen participants die from the severity of their wounds. See Ducat (2006) 249–60 and Kennell (1995) 70–83, 149–61.
- 12 The evidence for ballplaying in ancient Greece is limited, and it is possible that its importance as a team sport has been underestimated by modern scholars. Some athletic facilities had special rooms for ballplaying, and some ballgames involved teams. However, outside of Sparta, ballgames were not included in formally organized competitions, and it is impossible to know how regularly they were played and how seriously they were taken. The evidence is discussed in Harris (1972) 75–111. On the *sphairomachia* ballgame in Sparta, see Kennell (1995) 38–43, 59–63, 110–11, 131.
- 13 A variant of this explanation is that the reforms that (ostensibly at least) militarized Spartan society in the seventh and sixth centuries focused

Spartiates' attention on military training and thus prevented them from undertaking the sort of dedicated, specialized training for athletic competition that was becoming common in other Greek communities. This may have had the unintended effect of sharply reducing Spartan success in competition at the Olympic Games (Hönle (1972) 128–36; Pleket 1974). However, there is no evidence for the existence of the various features of dedicated, specialized training for athletic competition (e.g., professional coaches and trainers, special diets, etc.) before the fifth century (Kyle (1987) 141–5). What seems to have happened is that there were simply more athletes who trained in a relatively straightforward way, not that Sparta fell behind in regard to the particular kinds of training used.

- 14 The evidence for Spartan participation in sports contests held outside of Sparta, other than the Olympics, all pertains to horse-racing. In his catalog of victor monuments at Olympia, Pausanias (6.1.7, 6.2.1–2) mentions dedications by Spartan winners in the chariot race with inscriptions that referenced victories at other Panhellenic games, and Hodkinson ((2000) 308) discusses three amphoras, given as prizes at the Panathenaic Games in Athens and discovered in Sparta, that were awarded for chariot victories.
- 15 This problem could have been circumvented by making exceptions to restrictions on travel in the case of unusually talented athletes, but there is no evidence that such exceptions were made.
- 16 There is some uncertainty about precise dates, but the number of victories is reliable. The hiatus between the victories of 420 and 396 was due at least in part to the fact that Spartans were banned from competition at Olympia for an indeterminate period starting in 420 due to a conflict with the city-state of Elis, which ran the Olympics. See Hornblower (2000). The dates supplied here for Spartan chariot victories are taken from Hodkinson (2000) 308.
- 17 Much of the evidence for the heroization and worship of athletes in Sparta comes from Pausanias, but there is no doubt that most if not all of the cults for athletes that Pausanias encountered in the second century CE were already extant in the classical period. On the heroization of athletes in Sparta, see Christesen (2010).
- 18 The Damonon stele was clearly intended as a celebration of success in horse racing. It was topped by a relief showing a four-horse chariot and Damonon's equestrian victories are listed first.
- 19 Stewart ((1997) 108–18) argues that extant bronze handles for mirrors and ritual vessels, which depict female athletes and dancers and at least some of which seem to have been produced in Sparta (see later below), reflect the self-conception of Spartan females.

- 20 On girls' choral dancing in Sparta, see Calame (1997) and in the present work, Volume I, [Chapter 7](#); Griffith (2001); and Ingalls (2000).
- 21 There has been much debate on the nature and date of this statue, which is helpfully summarized in Serwint (1993) 408–11. On the Heraia, see Scanlon (2002) 98–120.
- 22 See Millender, this volume, [Chapter 19](#).
- 23 Nicolaus of Damascus (*FGrH* 90 F103 Z144.4) states in his summary of Spartan laws that 'there are *gymnasia* for *parthenoi* just as for men', but this may refer to exercises without a clear denotation of nudity.
- 24 This is the conclusion reached in Scanlon (2002) 121–38 though largely because he is primarily concerned with initiation rituals. For the opposite view, see Stewart (1997) 114.
- 25 The various theories on the motivations of Agesilaos and Kyniska are nicely summarized in Kyle (2003). They include the ideas that Kyniska's victories helped legitimize and solidify Agesilaos' position in Sparta, promoted Agesilaos' Panhellenic political agenda, were motivated by long-standing bad feelings between Agesilaos' family and Alkibiades, and reflected Kyniska's own sporting ambitions. On Kyniska and her Olympic triumphs, see Hodkinson (2000) 303–33; Kyle (2003); Millender (2009) 18–26; Pomeroy (2002) 19–24. The dates of Kyniska's Olympic victories are not absolutely certain, but are likely correct as given. At least some Spartan women rode horses and drove horse-drawn carts, but there is no direct evidence for their personal participation in competitions. The relevant evidence is collected in Pomeroy (2002) 19–24.

CHAPTER 22

Helotage and the Spartan Economy

Thomas Figueira

The system of servile labor at Sparta was nothing less than the central axis around which the social and economic structure of archaic and classical Lakōnikē was organized. The transfer of resources inherent in the system of helotage comprised – to change the metaphor – the alimentary canal of Laconian society. Classical Sparta was a brilliant realization of a state built to excel at warfare by a hoplite phalanx, with its polity embracing the *damos* (‘common people’), one that integrated an archaic vision of *dikē* (‘justice’) by suppressing intra-communal anxieties over status differentiation (Figueira (2002a) 153–9).

To appreciate the discussion below, some themes deserve emphasis. First, Spartan society had entered on a divergent evolutionary path by c.600. For those believing Sparta was an atypical *polis*, the challenge is not only to detail its deviations, but also to explain how Laconian development diverged from a shared Dark Age or early archaic order.¹ This is complicated by the paradigmatic nature of classical Sparta as a counter-model to democratic Athens, or point of departure for theoreticians. Complicating as well is the Spartan historical vision, where change was envisaged either as illicit departure from, or as restoration of, the Lykourgan political program. In turn, Lykourgos, a mythical prehistoric legislator (on whom see Nafissi, this work, [Chapter 4](#)), was held to have built on the *nomoi* (‘laws’) of a primordial Dorian community. Social evolution was, therefore, disguised as reversion to Sparta’s past, and significant divergences drop into silences in our record or become so transformed conceptually as to emerge in entirely different ideological registers. Second, interpreting Spartan society, while mindful of its divergence, requires us to muster the full body of source material (including the works of Plutarch), which needs to be deciphered with care to avoid anachronism. Dealing with the Spartan ‘mirage’ (the idealizing image of Sparta in later works) demands adjustment of our perspective, rather than blanket rejection of later evidence as fabrication.² Third, an important goal of archaic Spartan lawgiving was to homogenize differences of political and economic behavior. The famous austerity of the classical Spartans emerged from homogenization. Austerity increased over the late archaic period (after 600) as rules against the use of coinage were set, craftsmanship stagnated, and Lakōnikē (Spartan territory) became more isolated from international commerce.

22.1 Helotage: The Basic Features

Helots were servile agricultural workers who supported Spartan full citizens, called Spartiates or *Homoioi* ‘peers’, freeing them from working or managing property.³ With the exception of the seventh-century poet Tyrtaios, our sources derive from after the mid-fifth century and from non-Spartans. Authors (e.g., Herodotos, Thucydides) describe helots as historical actors (without, however, ever naming a single individual helot) only insofar as they involve Spartan policies and actions. Except for material derived contextually, our understanding of helotage is influenced by the works of Plutarch. Concerning the origins of the helots, our earliest commentators are fourth-century authors such as Hellanikos (*FGrH* 4 F 188), Ephoros (*FGrH* 70 F 117), and Theopompos (*FGrH* 115 F 13). Laconian helots were those enslaved first, many from southern Laconia in the eighth century, while Messenian helots were subjugated between 750 and 600, in struggles traditionally called the Messenian Wars. Cultural (and even status) variations between Laconian and Messenian helots can be hypothesized, although distinctions are elusive. Thucydides believed that their identity as Messenians was dominant (1.101.2). In the classical period, some helots undoubtedly self-identified as Messenian and aspired to liberation; others manifested assimilation to Spartan culture and eventually aspired to elevation to free citizen status through military service (e.g., as *Neodamōdeis*).

The helots, established on *klēroi* (‘allotments’), contributed rents; some sources indicate large amounts of natural products, and others 50 percent of production (e.g., Plut. *Lyk.* 8.7; Tyr. fr. 6W). Rents subsidized dues of the Spartiates to *syssitia* (‘common messes’), a prerequisite of citizenship. Helots were later described as lying between free and slave (e.g., Pollux 3.83), but it could also be concluded that the Spartiates were the most free of Greeks and helots the most enslaved (Kritias D-K 88B37). Young helots, either favorites or the mixed progeny of Spartiates, were sometimes educated as Spartans and achieved citizenship as *mothakes* (e.g., Hesych. s.v. *mothakes*). Individual Spartiates did not own helots, but, as full citizens, enjoyed the prerogative of sharing their labor. Thus, despite anachronism, ancient commentators could call them public, not private, slaves (e.g., Strabo 8.5.4 C365; Paus. 4.20.6; cf. Aris. *Pol.* 1263a35–7). Helots could only be manumitted by the state; the best known freed helots were the soldiers called *Neodamōdeis*. As long as they fulfilled their obligation of labor and rents, helots enjoyed some protections. If a Spartiate attempted to take more than the monthly rent, he might be punished by a public curse (Plut. *Mor.* 239e). Helots were able to have families, and they could not be sold abroad. They were also allowed their own religious practices and asylum (Thuc. 1.128.1: the sanctuary of Poseidon at Cape Tainaron).

Notwithstanding these protections, the helots were treated harshly, by being punished for getting fat or through having a number of blows prescribed for them annually (e.g., Myron *FGrH* 106 F 2). The citizen messes were one setting for degradation (e.g., Plut. *Lyk.* 28.8–9). Besides the customary rule that Spartiates should act as mutual protectors against the helots (e.g., Kritias D-K 88B37), several mechanisms were implemented to check helot disaffection. The *krypteia* (‘seclusion’) was both most notorious and obscure (Plut. *Lyk.* 28.1–4). This institution had youths ending their *agōgē* (‘upbringing’) by being sent into the countryside with daggers and limited rations. Hiding themselves by day, they captured and killed helots whom they encountered at night, especially the most enterprising. Such police measures are correlated with the annual declaration of war on the helots by the ephors, so that those shedding their blood could escape pollution (Plut. *Lyk.* 28.4; Aris. fr. 543 Gigon). Thucydides (4.80) also records a brutal murder of 2,000 helots, ones freed and enfranchised for military service.⁴ They fell under suspicion because of their willingness to claim distinction.

Although helotage freed Spartiates from work, Aristotle (*Pol.* 1269a34–b12) believed it a problematic system, and its probity was contested (cf. Alkidamas fr. 3A). Thucydides also emphasizes the centrality of the helot threat to Spartan policy-making (4.80.2–3). Similarly, Plato (*Laws* 6.777c) observes the frequency of Messenian revolts, and Aristotle notes the intractability and vulnerability associated with the institution, stating that the helots lie in wait to exploit Spartan misfortunes (*Pol.* 1269a37–b12). The earliest revolt was perhaps c.660 in upper Messenia (i.e., the Second Messenian War); Plato (*Laws* 698d–e) implied a Messenian revolt in 490, preventing aid at Marathon (although the revolt is unmentioned by Herodotos). The most prominent revolt in c.465, sometimes called the Third Messenian War, followed directly on a devastating earthquake and perhaps lasted ten years. Helots of Laconia also joined, along with some *perioikoi*, second-class citizens, of southern Messenia. (On the *perioikoi* in general, see Ducat, this volume, [Chapter 23](#)). A requirement to suppress helot rebellion was a provision of the Spartan-Athenian alliance of 421 (Thuc. 5.23.3). Similar obligations may be suspected in the oaths of the Hellenic League (480) and constituent treaties of the Peloponnesian League.

After Sparta’s defeat by Thebes at Leuktra in 371 and the foundation of the Arkadian Confederacy, Lakōnikē was invaded, and the independence of Messene established by the Theban leader Epameinondas. Whereas the conquest and continued subjection of Messenia secured for Sparta the material and human resources for its social regime, its liberation after 371 greatly reduced Spartan territory and servile labor force, and relegated Sparta to a second-class power. Nonetheless, helotage in reduced form lasted into the Roman period.

22.2 Beginnings

In the eighth century, the core of the Spartan state in the Eurotas valley, namely its four villages and outlying Amyklai, was quite like other early archaic southern Greek societies. Sites with access to sufficient land for population growth *in situ* underwent economic differentiation and growth in non-agricultural production. Craft specialization could proceed only where sufficient demand was concentrated. Thus, Sparta was well positioned to adopt *polis* organization, especially since sufficient smallholders retained enough social autonomy to force the elite to form institutions that included the common people. A larger population of smallholders offered the proto-*polis* the possibility for a broadly based army. The hoplite phalanx emerged as a dynamic convergence of weapon technology, primitive tactics, and communal values and solidarity.

Such a hoplite army was essential in preserving *polis* core territory. As on Euboia or at Argos or Corinth, the early *polis* attracted or compelled smaller, peripheral communities into its orbit. For Laconia,⁵ it helps for comprehending these circumstances that inhabitants of these communities were called *perioikoi* (lit. 'dwellers-around').⁶ Their slippage under domination naturally entailed territorial adjustments, surrender of rights of transit and access to resources like pasturage, neutralization as threats, and willingness to assist in protecting militarily the interests of the dominant center. If the Argolid and Euboia provide models, religious leagues could be vehicles for subordination. Subjugated communities tendered offerings and 'tithes' to a prestigious common cult. The estates of the Spartan kings in perioikic towns appear a vestige of such dispensation (Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 15.3). As the elite of the dominant community extracted or redistributed goods in a ritual setting, 'cult' leagues supported an aristocratic polity. Efforts to express regional domination over smaller communities generated captives not otherwise ransomed or redeemed (as in Homeric epic). The Laconian helots were *douloi* ('slaves') since the Greeks did not make the distinctions in forms of servitude that modern observers have proposed.⁷

Nonetheless, unfortunate Laconian *perioikoi* were not the main source of helots. Traditions on the origins of helot status are helpful in reaching this conclusion, even if not all that illuminating in establishing actual early history. We possess a series of origin accounts deriving from fifth- and fourth-century authorities.⁸ These are not only contradictory, but also appear to be attempts, by the historians concerned, to evoke various phenomena that they associated with classical helotage. These traditions imagine the helots as prisoners of war, members of pre-Dorian ethnicities, inhabitants of community margins, persons reduced in status for rebellion, populations of mixed extraction, and groups who failed in military obligations. Previous scholars applied a calculation of probabilities regarding these causations,⁹ choosing a likely scenario, or some combination, such as imagining a

conquest and reduction to serfdom, by Dorians, of an Achaean relict population. While it is hard to replace such ancient hypotheses, they should be condemned for their literalism, in which ideological aspects of the later helot situation are transcribed into actual events; for instance, persons who are marginal in social status must derive from ancestors inhabiting geographical margins, the marshes of southern Laconia.

In contrast to an unworkable single scenario for helot origins, it is more attractive to note other early archaic modes of exploitation (e.g., kidnapping, acquisition through barter, indebtedness) in order to supplement the traditional origins for helot lineages (e.g., conquest, status demotion, ethnic heterogeneity) because explications of the later institution cannot account for the origins of all its victims. A principle of economy of social control limits early Iron Age communities to one, or at most two, forms of exploitation, because prevailing levels of output cannot support structures for more variable exploitation. For example, helots were acculturated to inferiority by ritual degradation in the messes; they were policed by arbitrary cruelties of young men serving their year of the *krypteia*; they were probably rewarded for subservience by food recirculated through the messes. These and other methods of controlling the exploited expended scarce resources, including not least Spartan time and energy. Consequently, the origin of exploited persons is less significant than their social placement. One might decide to add to the ancestors of classical helots persons from other vulnerable groups, such as debt bondsmen. People deriving from outside Lakōnikē, e.g., captives in conflicts, gifts from allies, and persons received in trade – people becoming chattel slaves almost everywhere – could perhaps become helots at Sparta. Thus we turn from particular ancient theories of origination to analyzing the value of helotage for the exploiting class.

It is helpful to distinguish between *perioikic*-land and *perioikoi* and also between helot-land and helots. By observing the placement of *perioikic* towns *vis-à-vis* helot holdings, it is manifest that the latter were generally sited on more fertile land than the former (Figueira (1984a) 102–4; (2003b) 203–7). Intensive exploitation of servile labor (as here, where payments were 50 percent of cereal production) is only viable in favorable ecological settings. As some *perioikoi* possessed productive land, however, there were likely other conditions defining territory cultivated by helots. The communities of those reduced to helotage had been relatively delayed in developing *polis* structures, one reason for which was the distance of southern Laconia and Messenia from external models that might be discovered through connections between archaic elites.¹⁰ Nonetheless, the Spartans probably distinguished between the targets of eighth-century raiding: poorer victims were enlisted as allies while victims with superior access to productive assets became helots. Mere vulnerability was not, however, the only major characteristic of those who became helots. The elites of *perioikic* communities were also

characterized by a capacity for achieving détente with the Spartans. The *perioikoi* were skilled in using resource sets typical of second-tier agrarian sites (like those at higher elevations), of places with extractive activities (like mining, timbering, and associated crafts), or of sites like Gytheion where the sea provided subsistence. Moreover, no evidence exists of administration of helot labor – for example, how workers were matched with necessary tasks – and we have no trace of any officials, procedures, or institutions managing helot-land. Encouragement of migration by *perioikoi* and helots to territories suitable to their respective utilization served in the absence of actual management. Therefore, a churning of the demographic components of Lakōnikē is likely. Finally, our distinction between helot-land and helots is also enlightening because it promotes skepticism over whether specific helots in the classical period were the descendants of the initial inhabitants of their home fields.

The Penestai of Thessaly or Hektēmoroι of Attike illustrate one characteristic of archaic rural servile populations: indenture to an elite of wealthy landowners. A singularity of Spartan society is that the class of beneficiaries was expanded to the entire primary civic body of Spartiates. Many scholars envisage that a distribution of conquered land occurred,¹¹ although they differ as to its scale and how far the resultant property system deviated from elsewhere in Greece. It is improbable that conquered land was equally distributed when Dorian war bands first entered the Eurotas valley in the tenth century, perhaps enticed by uncultivated descendants of vast Mycenaean plantings of olives. Sparta could mean ‘sown [land]’,¹² suggesting that the area had been so systematically cultivated in the Mycenaean period that barley fields continued to grow naturally. To infiltrating Dorian bands, provision of olive production and grain crops without human intervention would have seemed providential, the basis for a sacral contract with gods and ancestral heroes. The myth of an early allocation became central to the later history of property in Lakōnikē. The transition to a ‘special’ property regime occurred by stages.

The distribution of the Peloponnese among Heraklid kings was relevant as an allocation between aristocratic lineages and their armed bands (Luraghi (2008) 48–61). That it entailed equal division among Dorian tribesmen, which in the fourth century Isokrates (6.20; 12.179, 259) and Plato emphasize (*Laws* 3.684D–E; 5.736C–E), seems an anachronism that was formulated under the influence of the tradition of Spartan equality. While not indicative of tenth-century reality, these references establish the classical association between Spartan land tenure and equality (Figueira (2004b) 52–3). Eighth-century Laconia probably experienced a Homeric-style distribution, in which *basileis* (‘kings’) received a disproportionate share, approximating preferential shares of plunder, elite estates in conquered communities, and exactions made for cults at the disposition of priestly families. Under this regime the Spartans

first seized territory in the Eurotas valley and began to raid Messenia, drawing income thence. Claiming heroic descent, their elite fashioned a mythological pedigree for exploitation of weaker populations by citing Herakles' rights over the lineages of Neileus and Hippokoon.¹³ Tyrtaios (late seventh century) visualizes his audience as Herakleidai when he exults in helot subservience and mourning over their masters' deaths (fr. 2.12–13, 11.1–2W). In classical Sparta, the right to govern as Herakleidai and compulsory helot mourning are reserved for the royal dynasties (Hdt. 6.58.2–3). That narrowing of privilege is significant. Archaic Sparta saw an elevation both of the royal dynasties as the genuine embodiment of Heraklid legitimacy and of the common Spartiate as full participant in the allocation of the communal assets.¹⁴

Scale was an essential feature of classical helotage. The conquest of Messenia was a watershed in establishing its viability. This large territory could only be secured by driving off the resistant groups. The Spartans acted to disrupt existing Dark Age settlements, like Nichoria in lower Messenia.¹⁵ In Messenia, canonical helotage entailed successive depopulations (Figueira (2003b) 221–5). Remaining helot workers in any locale were remnant populations after protracted resistance played itself out (the so-called Messenian Wars: traditionally c. 735–715, c.668–625 or 660–600). Although the *Messenika*, local histories of the region, are notoriously untrustworthy as factual documentation, they do offer traditions of resistance punctuated by the departure of various intractable groups.¹⁶ The Spartan conquest of the Messenians was contemporaneous with the Greek colonial movement – notably both Spartiate holdings, cultivated by helots, and the land granted to colonists were called *klēroi* ('allotments'). The existence of colonies such as Zankle in Sicily (a known destination¹⁷) as possible refuges for the most resistant Messenians spared Sparta from confronting die-hards for whom no other options for survival existed. Sometimes scholars have envisaged these displacements as removal of the Messenian elite, whom some would imagine as Dorians ruling a pre-Dorian or Achaean common people. Such a view, however, may require a more settled cultural matrix than is likely for late eighth- or seventh-century Messenia.

22.3 The Helot Allotments and Rents

The foundation of the Spartan social system lay in the *klēroi* 'allotments',¹⁸ that comprised arable land and the helots to cultivate it. One assumes the *klēroi* were named on analogy with allotments made in *apoikiai* ('colonies') and in other occupations of conquered land.¹⁹ Our evidence seems to vouch for a principle of equal shares among peer colonists.²⁰ The same principle of

equal division of the Spartan *politikē khōra* ('land of the *polis*') is specified by Polybios,²¹ and Spartan equality is a well-attested tradition (Figueira (2004b) 49–51). The ultimate origin of the *klēroi* may well have existed in lands given to Laconian aristocrats in eighth-century raids in the lower Eurotas valley and Messenia. The size of the late archaic or early classical *klēroi* has been a matter for scholarly speculation, but c.14.4–17.2 ha. is a likely magnitude.²² Therefore, the huge territory of Lakōnikē permitted an agrarian regime in which *klēroi* exceeded the estates of average farmers elsewhere (c.3.6–5.4 ha.). *Klēroi* not only exceeded median Attic landholdings, but they also generated output surpassing that of Athenian *Zeugitai* (notional hoplites), or 200 agricultural measures, and approximating that of *Hippeis* ('Knights') at Athens (300 measures). All Spartiates possessed holdings comparable to the lower range of the affluent elite in other *poleis*. No other mechanisms are known from Greek evidence for sustaining this high mean in property distribution other than the sort of limitations on alienation (i.e., sale or conveyance to someone else) that our testimonia attribute to Sparta. Furthermore, the disincentives to productivity and inefficiencies of servile labor ensure that the *klēros*-system can only have been implemented on unusually productive land.

My reconstruction of the *klēroi* endeavors to account for the full range of evidence on the Spartan regime of subsistence and includes the indications that Sparta had an atypical property system for a Greek *polis*. This picture reflects the account of Polybios and the traces of a 'constitutional' tradition on Sparta that begins with Aristotle and his students and is preserved in Plutarch, not only in his *Lykourgos*, but also in his *Agis*, *Instituta Lycurgi*, and *Dicta Lycurgi*.²³ Our sources speak of the creation of thousands of *klēroi* (3,000, 4,500, 6,000, 9,000) by Lykourgos and perhaps also by King Polydoros, and imply various divisions of *klēroi* between Laconia and Messenia (Plut. *Lyk.* 8.5–6; *Agis* 8.2). The number of 4,500 *klēroi* associated with the third-century reforms of Agis IV suggests an equal split between Laconia and Messenia. That seems unlikely when one considers the extent of the two regions and their number of *perioikic* communities. That Polydoros created an additional 3,000 to a Lykourgan 6,000 might indicate the creation of a second 3,000 in Messenia to supplement an earlier 3,000/3,000 interregional division. Estimates of arable land put at least two-thirds of the *klēroi* in Messenia (Figueira (1984a) 101–2; (2003b) 203–11).

Nevertheless, all the ancient figures for the *klēroi* merely render as design or hold as canonical the number 9,000. The testimony of Aristotle and Herodotos (on the mobilization for the battle of Plataia, in 479) indicates a highest level for the Spartiates c.9,000–10,000 (Aris. *Pol.* 1270a36; Hdt. 7.234.2, 9.10.1, 28.2). Consequently, the 9,000 *klēroi* represent an estimate of a maximum number of adult male Spartiates that was reached 479–466. At some point in archaic Spartan history, the primordial Dorian occupation of Laconia started

to be considered a distribution of equal shares, probably under the influence of contemporary equal allocations in the colonies. Perhaps the archaic (late seventh-century?) agrarian reform tried to accommodate 2,000 Spartans as *klēros* holders, contending that this was the size of the Dorian host occupying Laconia. Isokrates reports this traditional figure.²⁴ If this hypothesis is valid, the ascent of the Spartiates from c.2,000 to c.10,000 from perhaps 630 to 465 (at the extremes) would stand as a remarkable testimony to the vitality of Spartan social arrangements.

In envisaging the *klēros*-system, anachronistic categorization must be avoided. *Klēros*-land constituted the *politikē khōra* ('land of the *polis*') of Sparta (Polyb. 6.45.3–4). Yet to describe it as public property is erroneous, because this could only invoke private property as its counterpart. The creation of the *klēros*-system preceded the emergence of private property, as the individual as an economic actor had not fully separated himself from his lineage, nor had a market in land developed. The *klēroi* were collective property as the common acquisition of the community, but no public apparatus existed to exert control over or to manage them. Quite different are the collective farms of modern communism that adapt either the work regimen of nineteenth-century European factories or of Asian village communes of subsistence farmers. Rather the *klēroi* were only 'political' for their falling within the authority of the community to establish the suitability of their holders and set the rules for their transfer. Similarly, Strabo (8.5.4 C365) describes the helots as *dēmosioi* ('public [property]'), a revealing expression although it introduces again an anachronistic distinction between ownership of public and private property.

Certain landholdings were excluded from this politicized regimen, and this exemption was realized within a conventional early archaic social structure.²⁵ Sparta never became a completely egalitarian community; the distinction between aristocrats and *damos* continued. Tempted to denominate land held apart from reallocation as private property, we again recall that such a category was not yet viable. Original holdings, however, which were not perceived as conquests of the proto-*polis* acting collectively, appear to have been excluded from the *klēros*-system. This land was presumably concentrated in the core territory of the Spartan villages and Amyklai. This reservation much favored the traditional aristocracy because it perpetuated an early archaic agrarian regime. The failure of an early market in land to develop meant that reserved land was also inalienable. There may even have been helots working such estates, the descendants of people subjugated before Sparta's great expansion (from the late ninth and early eighth centuries). Thus, features of the Spartan polity, such as the choice of the *gerontes* ('senators') from a few families, were natural outgrowths of the preservation of an early archaic aristocracy. Hence came Sparta's international athletes, its dedicators at panhellenic sanctuaries, and the wealthy lineages with whom the

kings intermarried. Yet remarkably at Sparta, the physical appurtenances of landed wealth and the manifestations of behavioral differentiation accorded the rich elsewhere were denied to descendants of the old landed elite. This homogenization created the *Homoioi* ('peers'), full Spartan citizens or Spartiates, who were *isodiaitoi* ('equal in lifestyle') (Thuc. 1.6.4–5). Yet, notwithstanding its concessions in behavioral opportunities, the old elite survived.

The success of the *klēros*-system is demonstrated by the expansion of Sparta. Such success probably turned the old core territory into a mosaic of estates and tiny plots of non-*klēros*-land. By intermarriage and dowering, the elite would try to preserve its estates just as wealthy landholders did in Attike and elsewhere. Limits on elite display and consumption, by excluding many misadventures that befell the wealthy elsewhere, promoted stability. The stability for the privileges of the elite excluded the necessity for expensive patronage that might otherwise have led aristocrats to squander their estates. In contrast, the archaic Spartan *damos* grew unrestrictedly because the state assured possession of *klēroi* to all who completed the *agōgē*.²⁶ Thus, ever smaller holdings of the *damos* in non-*klēros* land – plots too small to manage through family planning and marital status strategies – would have been created through partible inheritance, so that many ordinary Spartiates must have come to possess a *klēros* as their only significant holding.²⁷ As long as Lakōnikē was free from rebellion and external attack and helot numbers were rising, the heavy dependence of common Spartiates on their *klēroi* was not problematic. The social order would later come under stress only when manpower shortages afflicted Lakōnikē.²⁸

Tradition reports two sorts of levy or rent from the helots – in kind, naturally, in the Spartan barter economy – a proportion of 50 percent (Tyrtaios fr. 6W; cf. Paus. 4.14.4–5; Ael. *VH* 6.1), and a fixed number of *medimnoi* ('bushels') of barley (Plut. *Lyk.* 8.4, 12.2; cf. Myron *FGrH* 106 F 2), 72 for the Spartiate and 12 for his wife,²⁹ and scholars have generally chosen one of these alternatives. However, the 50 percent levy and a fixed rent were possibly aspects of a single system (Figueira (2003b) 199–203). The one-half exaction embodies a Dark Age pattern of even division between a superior and an inferior group, as confirmed by test of battle (Figueira (2003b) 199; Link (2004) 2–4). The fixed amounts, however, ensured generous support for a Spartiate soldier. Enough grain to support about 4–8 people at subsistence was left after the Spartiate paid his mess dues. Spartan officials, perhaps even the ephors, allocated helots and land to Spartiates by observation of their productivity, with an eye toward estimating a *klēros* in which 50 percent of the output of a particular group of helots on a certain extent of land approximated the needed amount of the main crop of barley.³⁰ The focus on the grain yield probably left some incentive for the helots to produce certain products (like livestock?) that may not have been subject to the 50 percent

rule. That the relations between Spartiate and helot were not monetized until the Hellenistic period reveals the archaic and conservative character of Spartan exploitation. This absence of monetary exactions occurred within the framework of a barter economy.

Perhaps the Spartans also had a rough formula by which to reckon the number of helot males appropriate for supporting a single Spartiate. In the mobilization for the Plataia campaign in 479, each mustered Spartiate brought along seven helots (Hdt. 9.10.1, 9.29.1). These 35,000 helots were a significant proportion of all male helots. The rationale behind this levy was the security of Lakōnikē, because a mass of untrained and potentially disloyal followers had little military value.³¹ The justification of the ratio of seven to one might lie in a preexisting rule of thumb about administering the *klēroi* rather than in some strategic or demographic calculation.

Once the Spartiate's income from this main constituent of his diet was assured, products other than grain were either subject to their own specific rents (unfortunately unknown) or left to the 50 percent rule. Allocating production of the grain crop was thus consequential for *klēros* demarcation. Hence we appreciate the anecdote in which Lykourgos supposedly first viewed reordered Lakōnikē at harvest time, comparing it to an inheritance divided equitably between brothers (Plut. Lyk. 8.4; cf. *Mor.* 226B). Let us recall that the Spartans are never described as managing the helots or *klēroi*. Such a commitment of time would have worked at cross-purposes with their exclusion from ordinary economic involvements. It would have introduced status differentiation, as their individual managerial skills would have varied considerably. The *klēros*-system was truly absentee 'ownership', initially without direct supervision. Supervision would have entangled the economic fortunes of single Spartiates with their own individual helots and transformed helotage into a congeries of dependent relationships, rather than the balanced confrontation of two economic castes as presented in our sources.

Such an agrarian regime is reconcilable with the absence of a state administration for supervising the helots. Annual review during harvests sufficed. As the helot population rose through natural increase, the number of *klēroi* could rise accordingly. An ample stock of fertile land, especially in Messenia, permitted the helots to increase numbers by allowing them to cultivate idle fields around their holdings and vacant tracts or to farm more intensively land already under cultivation.³² The evidence for holding possible *klēros*-land in reserve is provided by the Thyreatis after its seizure from Argos in c.546, because it was left sufficiently vacant to accommodate several settlements of the fugitive Aiginetans in 430 (Thuc. 2.27.2, 4.56.2). Most distributed *klēros*-land lay in the interior of Lakōnikē and was insulated by *perioikic* towns from the northern border and from some points of best access to the sea. Helot losses to war and flight were probably low. Thus, personal security from hostilities was another incentive toward helot

compliance.

As the *klēros*-system expanded, the Spartans possessed another powerful tool for maintaining helot cooperation. They could offer young helot males early and risk-free opportunities to marry and form their own *oikoi* without their waiting to inherit. As already noted, Spartan control of Messenia had only been solidified through successive depopulations that left behind the more tractable. Surplus production of the main products of the *klēroi* was probably not left for appropriation by their helot producers, but was subject to the 50 percent levy. Even if this rent could not be practically raised on all output, it served as an important buttress of the Spartan class system, since it minimized licit opportunities for helot upward mobility. An ambitious, successful helot could not amass resources openly and permanently.³³ Unlike at Athens or elsewhere, land tenure with ‘private’ property and equal partition among heirs did not prevail on *klēros*-land, but a dispensation where a Spartiate’s connection with particular fields and with certain helots was more conditional and communally determined. Hypothetically, the simplest mechanism is that vacant *klēroi*, intact and indivisible, passed to sons and nearest heirs without *klēroi*. Any males not thus afforded *klēroi*, like younger sons of *klēros*-holders and those with surviving antecessors, were given new *klēroi*, created by demarcation.

The record of military power and the human resources underwriting its success tend to corroborate this reconstruction, because they indicate that Sparta had a strikingly different social order from contemporary *poleis*. Nonetheless, this reconstruction depends admittedly on an indispensable postulate, namely that a redistribution of land and dependent laborers had occurred sometime in the archaic period. In this social reconfiguration, there was no total restructuring, because core land holdings of the Spartiates were apparently preserved, and an early archaic wealth and status disparity between elite and *damos* was maintained. The accessions to the communal core, acquired by collective action of the *politai*, i.e. mainly territory in the lower Eurotas valley and in Messenia, were now equally divided in principle among all Spartiates as *Homoioi*. During the late-seventh-century suppression of the Messenians, affording equal shares may have constituted a pledge tendered by the Spartiates to each other. With the gradual subjection of Messenia, this pledge was implemented in an emplacement of the *klēros*-system over several decades.

We should therefore seek the inauguration of the *klēros*-system in the so-called Second Messenian War. Aristotle noted that the poems of Tyrtaios – remember that he had a more complete dossier than our survivals – reveal political pressure for land redistribution (*Pol.* 1306b26–1307a2 with fr. 1W). Our reconstruction proposes that such an *anadasmos* (‘re-division’) actually took place outside the field of view now offered by the Tyrtaian corpus. Tyrtaios seems to show a *polis* dependent on a hoplite army, but one with a

more conventional aristocratic elite, self-identifying as Heraklids, who interrelated in *symposia* and did not yet interact with the *damos* in *syssitia*. The helots already existed, the *klēros*-system may not have. Some citizen fighters were not hoplites, as *gumnētai* ('light armed troops') also fought in the Spartan army (*POxy* #3316). Tyrtaian exhortations to young fighters in the forefront of the phalanx or even in its vanguard (sometimes perhaps as mounted infantry in a corps of Hippeis: (Figueira (2006) 67–70) reveal tensions between age groups that the educational system would later address (Tyr. 10.1, 21, 30; 11.4, 12; 12.16, 23W). If we accept the implication of Aristotle that Tyrtaian poetry resisted agitation toward redistribution, such poetic gestures would harmonize with the generally conservative and conciliatory thematic of the corpus. At the same time, Tyrtaios reveals a strong impetus toward a hoplite polity and a more austere regimen.

The *klēros*-system was, then, a creation of the late seventh or early sixth century, not a vestige of a primordial Dorian order or the result of the legislation of a mythical Lykourgos before 750. Its prehistory represents fabrication of earlier history in order to consolidate a false collective memory. While the *klēros*-system was created in an interlocking group of changes, Spartan austerity was not legislated in a single program. Rather, the strong tendency toward egalitarianism and against elite ostentation inherent not only in the *klēros*-system but also in the messes suppressed conspicuous consumption by stages. Recourse to the practice of *xenēlasia* ('expulsion of foreigners') and prohibition on residence abroad accentuated inhibitions against outward expression of different grades of material status. These manifestations of xenophobia decoupled the Spartans symbolically from elite *mores* prevalent elsewhere and practically from trade exchanges supporting conspicuous consumption (Figueira (2003a) 62–6). The existence of a barter economy, where open ownership of gold and silver had been prohibited (probably in the sixth century), protected the evolution toward austerity (Figueira (2002a) 153–5).

The Sparta of my reconstruction does not possess a tendency toward demographic decline unlike the Sparta which others have surmised. For instance, Hodkinson has imagined a large body of equal *klēros*-holders, the size and number of whose estates declined under the influence of differential procreation that was filtered through partible inheritance.³⁴ That would entail an impossibly large hoplite army for *c.*600 (or whenever one supposes that the *klēroi* were created). It is better to hypothesize a relatively small complement of initial *klēros*-holders that grew steadily into the fifth century until the Great Earthquake of *c.*465. Concomitant with our hypothesis is the existence of some mechanism that acted against the division of the *klēroi*. Such a prohibition against division and alienation was a provision of the 'communist' system of land tenure in the Lipari islands *c.*560 (Diod. Sic. 5.9.3–5; see Figueira (1984b)) and was certainly a feature of fifth-century Athenian *klēroi*

that were held by cleruchs (Figueira (1991) 176–85). In some form, it may have been a feature of much early colonization as well (cf. Aris. *Pol.* 1319a10–11).

The reconstruction of equivalent helot-cultivated *klēroi* that were not initially divisible greatly differs from the treatment of Spartan land tenure in the *Politics* of Aristotle (1264b6–1271b19). Viewed in terms of historiography, this confrontation embodies two forms of political inquiry among the Peripatetics, the school of Aristotle. One form can be called the ‘constitutional’ tradition as it was presented in the *Politeiai* (constitutional treatises on Sparta) of Aristotle and his pupil, Dikaiarchos (Figueira (2016, 15–17)). In contrast, the treatment in the *Politics* conveys observations on the social realities of mid-fourth-century Sparta. Both modes of interpretation imbibed the essentially achronicity of Spartan historiography, as the constitutional treatises presented a system legislated by Lykourgos while the *Politics* cite an anonymous lawgiver. The dimension of time needs to be added to both forms of Peripatetic investigation to create a coherent social evolution. Accordingly, we might synthesize these visions of Sparta by offering a de-idealized form of the ‘constitutional’ picture as an archaic social order and by accepting the testimony of the *Politics* as reflecting an altered set of arrangements affecting Sparta’s agrarian regime in the classical period. As seen below, the period after the Great Earthquake of c.465 will be proposed as the tipping point for the revisions of the archaic economic dispensation.

22.4 Messes and Dues

The other pole of the axis of production in Lakōnikē comprised the *syssitia* (‘messes’), which played a unique role in the Spartan economy.³⁵ The messes existing at Tiryns and in Crete differed significantly, despite a common origin.³⁶ At Tiryns, the meals were more elite gatherings than at Sparta. The scale of such transfers was limited by number of recipients or by the occasions for the transfers. On Crete messes did include the body of citizen families, but the messes were supported directly from public revenues (including income from dependent communities). At Sparta, however, a vast engine for the cycling of production was established. Tendering of the mess contributions and membership in a mess were prerequisites for the maintenance of full citizenship, so that commensality encompassed the entire civic body. Embodying egalitarianism, and bound with strict rules limiting displays of wealth-based status differentiation, the messes inculcated a regimen of austerity.

The messes were the focus of male life, and daily attendance was mandatory. The dues were set high, as seen from the enumerations of their components in Plutarch’s *Lykourgos* (12.3) and in Athenaeus (Athen. 4.141; cf. *ΣPlato Laws*

633A.), who cites Dikaiarchos' *Tripolitikos* (fr. 72 [Wehrli]). These authorities may have used different sources, but clearly the dues were an element in the constitutional treatises of Aristotle and Dikaiarchos. The monthly amounts were 1.5 Attic *medimnoi* or 1 Laconian *medimnos* of *alphita* ('barley groats'), eight Laconian or 11/12 Attic *khoes* ('quarts') of wine, five *mnai* (*mna* = c. 431 gr.) of cheese, two-and-a-half *mnai* of figs, and *opsōnion* ('side-dishes') worth 10 Aiginetan obols. The use of a monetarily-denoted amount is incongruous because using coinage was forbidden to Spartiates. Therefore, this practice was probably first adopted as a military procedure on campaign, where Spartans dealt with merchants conducting business in Aiginetic standard currency. The quota of 10 obols in the messes at home was an act of 'domestication' of the military messes of the army on campaign. Indeed the *syssitia* themselves institutionalized the *syskēnia* ('military messes') by importing into life at home the simplicity and shared lives of infantrymen serving in the field (Hdt. 1.65.5; Polyain. 2.3.11). The late archaic and early classical Spartan army used the civic messes as basic units.

Since mess membership was virtually limited to men who passed through the *agōgē* and was a criterion of citizenship (Aris. *Pol.* 1271a26–37; 1272a13–16), the high dues threshold practically tied retention of citizenship to the possession of a *klēros* and support by helot workers. The definition of *klēros* rents and the enumeration of dues were thus conjoined acts of social design. Furthermore, mess dues far exceeded the foodstuffs necessary to sustain a well-nourished man in his daily main meals (being five to six times minimum annual subsistence).³⁷ This superfluity is especially striking in the surplus of dues in wine, since Spartiates were notoriously abstemious about wine consumption in their messes.³⁸ Some recipients of this additional wine were helots, who were permitted to imbibe to intoxication and to embarrassment for their buffooneries, which indignities were staged before the Spartiate mess members.³⁹ The messes were, then, a mechanism that acculturated Spartiates to superior sociopolitical roles and helots to their status of social and moral inferiority.

I have wished to go further and theorize that this dispensation of wine was part of a broader usage of the messes as channels for redistribution, for giving back to the helots a portion of the helot rents they paid in kind.⁴⁰ An exaction of 50 percent of production is at the upper limit of practical rents among near-subsistence agriculturalists. Such rents diverted so much output of foodstuffs that they left the helots particularly susceptible to an incentive mechanism that offered food as a reward for displays of compliance.⁴¹ Wine as a foodstuff and an intoxicant is especially relevant in food recirculation, since it was universally in demand, readily consumable, and relatively portable (even for transferring large amounts of calories). Just as Appalachian farmers converted surplus grain into moonshine whiskey to transport agricultural output in mountainous terrain, wine recirculated in the messes avoided some costs of a

redistributive system.

Furthermore, another argument in favor of the hypothesis of considerable redistribution to the helots is that some such mechanism is needed to reconstruct a viable demographic and economic model for Lakōnikē (Figueira (1984a) 100–4; (2003b) 217–20). The exemption from gainful labor of the entire Spartiate population built into Spartan agriculture a shortage of manpower. Without redistribution, it is hard to posit appropriate amounts of helot labor to man the *klēros*-system and to provide the required mess dues. Also difficult is explaining how 35,000 male helots were available for the expeditionary force to Plataia in 479. At that time, Spartiate adult males (18+) exceeded 8,000 and total holders (or potential holders) of *klēroi* approximated 10,000. Estimates of the arable land in Lakōnikē sharpen this dilemma as they imply that Laconia and Messenia were fully utilized to support 10,000 *klēroi*.

The lack of managerial or administrative structures for the system of *klēroi* reveals why the *syssitia* were the context for food redistribution in the archaic Spartan economy. Spartiates may well have bartered with fellow *Homoioi*, *perioikoi*, and helots, but keeping recirculation in the quasi-public setting of the mess discouraged individual Spartiates from developing multifaceted relationships with the helots supporting them, interactions in which the Spartiate might provide incentives for higher output of which the helot might receive a share. Rather, the communal setting of the mess linked material advantage for the helot with acceptance of abuse. Thus the incentives toward cooperation did not serve the interests of the individual Spartiate, but engendered compliance with the whole civic body. Indeed, analysis of the helots as a class often fails us because Spartan practice acted to forestall the emergence of intra-class integration not only through incentives (noted above), but also through threats. In conjunction, these means constitute a policy of ‘divide to rule’. Thus, beneficiaries of recirculation could not be numerous at any one time. Rather the few favored were well positioned to act as patrons of the other helots through allotting food to those cooperative toward the Spartiates and themselves. The shadowy *mnōionomoi*, described as *arkhontes* (‘leaders’) of the helots, may be relevant in this connection (Hesych. s.v.).

The ‘carrot’ of recirculated food was balanced by the ‘stick’ of repressive measures. The ephors declared war on the helots annually (Aris. fr. 543 Gigon with Plut. *Lyk.* 28.4); the helots submitted to a regimen of arbitrary abuse with a quota of blows (Myron *FGrH* 106 F2); and the youths of the *krypteia* meted out extra-legal violence toward the helots as though enemies (Plut. *Lyk.* 28.1–4 with Aris. fr. 543; Aris. *apud* Heracl. Lembos 373.10D; Myron *FGrH* 106 F2). Nevertheless, after the Spartiate population declined so that a smaller civic body had access to more land, it may well be that inhibitions against management of the *klēroi* weakened. Increased opportunities for specific supervision may have devolved upon Spartan women.

22.5 Population and Land Tenure

The wealth and military power of Greek *poleis* are often a direct reflection of population growth.⁴² The analysis of the Spartan pattern of dependent labor outlined above indicates how Sparta emerged as one of the most powerful archaic *poleis* through demographic vitality (Figueira (1986) 170–5). Spartan control over Messenia could only be achieved through a series of depopulations in which those most resistant to reduction to helotage were driven into exile, and a remnant population remained as helots. When the *klēroi*-system consolidated in the late seventh century, the *klēroi* perhaps only numbered a few thousand. Then Spartan power was restricted by the limit of helot workers and not by shortages of fertile land. As late as the struggle with Tegea in the 570s, it was labor and not land for which Sparta made war. The Spartans brought fetters for the Tegeans to symbolize reduction to servitude, although they doubtless expected to annex for *klēroi* the best arable Tegean land (Hdt. 1.66.1–4). The resistance offered by the Arkadians, based on their linguistic, ethnic, and political solidarity, rendered vain this dream of a new stock of subject laborers. Hence the decision to bind the Spartans' neighbors by a series of alliances had as its internal corollary opting for a policy of slow growth in the complement of Spartiates. Notably this shift can also be traced for the *perioikoi*, because no further groups of refugees from elsewhere in Greece were accommodated before the Peloponnesian War.

Sparta experienced steady growth over the sixth century. As noted above, the Spartans could offer young helot males an early, easy opportunity to form their own households, because there was still much good land available when the Spartiates numbered but a few thousand. Some helot flight may have occurred but fugitives had to run a gauntlet of *perioikic* towns and allied *poleis* (as suggested by the treaty with Tegea: *SVA* #112), as well as to defy the vigilance of the *kryptoi*. Compared to the losses of young men for other *poleis* in war and invasion, reduction of helot laborers through flight was probably insignificant. If suppositions about the mixed origins of the helots are correct, the Spartans may even have supplemented their natural increase through importation of captives and slaves.

The Spartiates themselves had little motivation toward family limitation. A *klēros* was guaranteed each male who completed the *agōgē*. While partible inheritance probably prevailed over non-*klēros* land, possessing a little more or less of it had no practical effect on social standing when compared with success in the *agōgē* and on campaign. The granting of dowries was probably forbidden (Plut. *Mor.* 227F), a provision which excluded a tool of social mobility used elsewhere, and the kings awarded heiresses on the basis of Spartiate *aretē* (Hdt. 6.57.4). Access to the aristocracy was barred by custom

and lacked the cachet of exclusivity known elsewhere, since conspicuous expression of elite status was suppressed. The annual high office of the ephorate was open to the entire *damos*: this was a powerful compensation balancing the retained privileges of the old elite.

It is inconceivable that an early Greek *polis* could have a population policy. Rather, the Spartans created conditions where the number of helots grew; thus there was a growing reservoir of helot workers to support a rising number of Spartiates. This buoyancy is illustrated by various events. Circa 546, the Spartans were willing to risk, and, in the event, sacrifice, their entire corps of elite troops, the Hippeis, in a duel with the Argives (Hdt. 1.82.1–8). As the sixth century advanced, Sparta became more aggressive, ranging farther afield militarily to the Isthmos and to its north, and even sallying into the Aegean to strike at Naxos and Samos. Dorieus, brother of Kleomenes, may have taken as many as 1,000 Spartans off as colonists *c.*514–512 (Hdt. 5.42.2). The Laconia Survey vouches for at least one new *perioikic* community being founded at Sellasia through deliberate occupation by internal settlers.⁴³ In the small clusters of helots scattered on *klēros*-land, it would not have been feasible to match young men and women or to ensure that their most likely places for living were in the vicinity of kinsmen. Spartan ritual activities were exposing the helots to the dominant Spartiate culture, and helot rural cult practices were bringing them into contact with their fellows. Therefore, two kindred cultural processes were advancing: all inhabitants of Lakōnikē were converging in fundamental behavior, such as common dialect, religious practices, and high culture, and there was a churning of demographic components, as intermarriage and exogamy between families and among small communities, as well as internal colonization, affected both *perioikoi* and helots. In particular, the helots felt integrative and differential cultural forces, as illustrated by a later episode from the Theban invasion of Lakōnikē (370). Captured, or is that ‘liberated’?, helots refused to perform the poetry of archaic Spartan poets Terpandros, Alkman, and Spondon, on the grounds that their masters forbade it (Plut. *Lyk.* 28.5). However, it appears that they could have done so; they knew the poetry in question.

As Sparta entered the fifth century, its population was reaching its apogee. The expeditionary corps that appeared at Marathon (490) looks like a picked force of the first ten age classes.⁴⁴ Leonidas faced the loss of his expeditionary force of three hundred Spartiates at Thermopylai (480) with relative equanimity.⁴⁵ The 5,000 Spartiates at Plataia (479) were perhaps the normal two-thirds levy (men aged twenty to forty-nine) out of a complement of men aged twenty to sixty exceeding 8,000. At that time, then, all male Spartiates totaled *c.*10,000. Yet it is in fact difficult to accommodate 10,000 *klēroi* on the arable land of Laconia and Messenia. With so many Spartiates, it is also hard to explain how the 35,000 helots conscripted for the Plataia campaign were fed. Indeed, if, on the basis of the arable land of Laconia and

Messenia, we calculate the upper limits of the *klēros*-system to provide food, high estimates for helot numbers, common in earlier scholarship, become doubtful.⁴⁶ The number of helots, male and female of every age, lay between 85,000 and 115,000. Even these numbers probably entail the existence of channels (in my view, through the messes) by which food was recirculated to the helots. Nonetheless, the servile population of Spartan territory was very large ([Plato] *Alcib.* 1.122d; Plut. *Solon* 22.2), as confirmed by its comparison with the Chian slave population by Thucydides (8.40.2).

Circa 479, therefore, in its utilization of Laconia and Messenia, the *klēros*-system was reaching its practical limit, which was not only imposed by available land, but also by the challenge of mobilizing a sufficient labor force under a 50 percent rent. However, Sparta possessed additional land in the Thyreatis, later granted to Aiginetan refugees, but still available for creating *klēroi* in 479. Potentially, the Spartans also possessed a powerful tool for extending the ability of any number of *klēroi* to support Spartiates: a delay after birth in initial assignment of *klēroi* made 9,000–10,000 *klēroi*, for example, support a larger population because mortality was heavy in the first years of life and boys could easily be supported by their parents up to age seven, the beginning of the *agōgē* (Figueira (1984) 96–7, and n. 26 above). Therefore, any attempt to model flows of output in the Spartan economy inevitably works from this ‘snapshot’, one which reflects the demographic highpoint of the political economy of Lakōnikē.⁴⁷

This is the demographic profile of a self-confident power, one not unduly troubled by Attic promotion of the Delian League, however unwelcome the transfer of the hegemony at sea appeared. During the 470s, this Sparta saw off threats to its Peloponnesian supremacy in Arkadian dissension and a revived Argos. Nevertheless, the homogenization and mixture of elements of the helot population, which expansion and even the basic operation of the *klēros*-system entailed, nurtured the seeds of challenge for Sparta’s social order. Because Spartan ideology necessitated that helot cultural identity manifest the converse of civic identity, it is unsurprising that the helots fashioned a self-image in an inversion of Spartan myth-history that embodied aspirations to escape from their exploited status. Their raw material comprised folk memories of early resistance to Sparta that accreted around the charismatic hero Aristomenes and a peasant religiosity that encompassed fertility rituals.⁴⁸ A central theme was a purported descent from the citizens of a subjugated *polis*, Messene, which had occupied the region west of Mt. Taygetos until destroyed by Sparta. Thucydides states that the helots were generally called Messenians by virtue of the descent of their majority from the ancient Messenians (1.101.2).⁴⁹ Thus, if they chose a path of resistance regarding their status, the helots throughout Lakōnikē could claim that they were Messenian (and not entirely unreasonable on our hypothesis of demographic mixture). This Messenian *persona*, however, was not adopted by all helots.

Some staked their aspirations on cooperation with the Spartiates and sought opportunities for upward mobility within the dominant ideological system and not in opposition to it.

The next stage of Spartan demography is punctuated by an exogenous event of enormous impact. In c.465, an earthquake convulsed Lakōnikē, its epicenter near Sparta itself. Perhaps 20,000 free Laconians perished and Sparta was laid waste. This natural disaster was understood by many helots as a providential signal for armed resistance. The ensuing revolt lasted ten years, although the Spartans soon pacified Laconia itself and later confined the rebels to the environs of Mt. Ithome in Messenia. The Spartan victory came only at the cost of a further loss of manpower in which the surviving rebels with their families were accorded the right of withdrawal. When the Spartan army is next glimpsed during the Peloponnesian War, it is substantially smaller. Rather than accept an inexplicable change in procreative patterns, one should assign this reduction of 50–60 percent of all Spartiates to the effects of the earthquake and rebellion.⁵⁰

Thucydides notes the presence in 431 of a large number of Peloponnesian young men who were both without experience of war and enthusiastic for hostilities (2.8.1). If Sparta was included in this phenomenon, as appears likely, a large cohort of men had matured since the Thirty Years Peace of 446/5, the oldest of whom had been sired right after the earthquake. Thus Sparta had probably returned during the years 465–31 to its typical demographic growth of the archaic period. However, the earthquake permanently changed Sparta (Figueira (2004b) 51–2.). The more fearful community of 431 is clearly a legacy. But more important for our purposes is a hypothetical change in land tenure. Aristotle speaks of a situation where land sale was discouraged but other transfers by gift, dowry, and testament were possible (*Pol.* 1270a18–21). Another tradition refers to an *arkhaia moira* (‘ancient portion’) that could not be alienated.⁵¹ As Myron of Priene implies, this *moira* was not merely land, but included obligations from the helots bound to that land. Another tradition, which appears in Plutarch’s *Agis* (5.3), describes a one-heir system in which *klēroi* descended from fathers to single sons in unbroken succession. That was a biological impossibility, but its likely appearance in Peripatetic and Stoic constitutional writing about Spartan traditions may indicate its role in classical Spartan discussion about how to manage inheritance.

In interpreting these testimonia, one should envision where land tenure must have stood after the earthquake and helot revolt (Figueira (1986) 184–7). *Klēros*-land was damaged significantly by the death or flight of its helots. Losing helot men threatened the Spartan economy, because the high rents at 50 percent of output kept the labor needs for cultivation of the *klēroi* dangerously near a level of insufficiency (Figueira (1984) 104–6). Subsistence agriculture is always dependent on work inputs from adult males, those most

likely lost in rebellion. Moreover, there were now many vacant *klēroi* because their beneficiaries had died. It is perhaps inevitable that such *klēroi* passed to the next in line of property succession. That was the easiest means to handle a stock of vacant *klēroi*, some with insufficient labor, and it guaranteed that any uneven distribution of helots was offset by multiple *klēros*-holdings for many Spartiates. The original *klēros* of each Spartiate, apparently called the *arkhaia moira*, was declared indivisible and inviolate.

These provisions were perhaps enacted during the revolt itself, 465–55, when rent extraction and worker availability were most unpredictable. The Spartans may still have felt obligated to provide a *klēros* for anyone completing the *agōgē*. The growing reservoir of helot laborers that had once allowed such provision had vanished, however. Spartiates could only provide for younger sons out of land acquired through the deaths of so many fellow citizens during the earthquake and revolt. Concomitantly, the treatment of heiresses changed as the nearest kinsman played a central role. That he was called a *klēronomos* (usually ‘inheritor’ but here probably ‘guardian’) implies that his function was to preserve a *klēros*, probably the *arkhaia moira*, of the heiress’ father (Aris. *Pol.* 1270a26–9). Furthermore, a manipulation of communal memory served to promote the ‘single-heir’ system (Plut. *Agis* 5.3 cf. [Plut.] *Mor.*, *Comm. in Hes.* 37). The ‘single-heir’ system placed the onus on the individual Spartiate to procreate his heir, but also discouraged fragmentation of holdings through engendering multiple male successors, who might be a challenge to equip with sufficient estates. Such policy defied procreative reality, where families failing to raise sons to adulthood must be offset by those with multiple sons. The single heir appears as ‘Lykourgan’ legislation in later historiography, admittedly an impossible designation, so that the important questions become the date of its inception and its purpose. It belongs to a moment when family planning was a sensitive issue. Did the single-heir practice originate in the period after the earthquake and revolt, as patriotic exhortation for ordinary Spartiates? In politicized economies, invocations of civic duty, relying on high degrees of conformity, clash with opportunistic behavior.

Yet the demographic situation of Sparta after the withdrawal of the rebels from Mt. Ithome to Naupaktos in 455 was not desperate. Sparta still had many Spartiate hoplites, comparable to mid-sixth-century levels, and its *perioikic* levy was much less affected by earthquake and revolt. The *perioikoi* were vulnerable only to catastrophic and military casualties, and not to an economic threat of losing servile laborers. What differed, after hostilities with Athens in the First Peloponnesian War ended (446), was the balance between social gradations within the Spartiate class. The massive reallocation of property and helots attendant upon a 45+ percent fall in the Spartiate population must have been quite uneven in its incidence. Some of those unlucky in the deaths of their kinsfolk became lucky in inheritance. Were there not families that suddenly found themselves heirs to land and labor equivalent to three or four

klēroi? If so, Sparta may have confronted for the first time non-elite persons who possessed holdings approximating those of members of its old aristocracy. Such persons might now have aspired to leading places.

Nonetheless, the Spartan economy appears to have stabilized. Thucydides vouches for a mass of young men in 431 eager for war. Spartiate numbers had probably been growing, and there was no sign of an inability either to extract sufficient rents from the *klēros*-land or to tender the required mess dues. We may date after the Thirty Years Peace (446/5) an initiative Thucydides notes, ostensibly intended to reward helots who had aided Sparta ‘in the wars’.⁵² Two thousand eventual honorees who made a circuit of Laconian sanctuaries – presumably entering the *damos* and freed from their servile obligations – were then secretly eliminated by the Spartans. Thucydides notes that the Spartans especially feared the *neotēs* (‘young of military age’) and *plēthos* (‘large number’) of the helots (4.80.3). This affair indicates that the available helot labor force had again achieved a satisfactory level. Eliminating workers by elevation, followed by assassination, seems inexplicable if many Spartiates possessed non-viable *klēroi*.

The Peloponnesian War, however, brought disastrous changes (Figueira (1986) 175–87). There were naturally attritional casualties, possibly not replaced by maturing youths in the war’s early years. Our first demographic conclusion depends on calculating the size of basic military units (*enōmotiai*, ‘platoons’) during the Pylos campaign (425).⁵³ A likely size-range for the *enōmotia* indicates a whole army smaller by 22–9 percent. This decline had been restricted to the Spartiates, now 45 percent fewer and only 38–41 percent of the army (50 percent at Plataia). This shows the lingering effects of the much earlier earthquake and revolt. Population decline had necessitated a major army reorganization. The mobilization for Pylos also allows a comparison with the Spartan army at Mantinea (418). Yet the size and organization of Spartan forces there is a notorious crux because Thucydides’ order of battle (5.68.2–3) appears to yield a smaller force than the circumstances and other evidence permit. Our solution is to double the size of the whole army by inserting *morai* (‘regiments’) above Thucydides’ *lokhoi* (‘battalions’). Thus the Spartans at Mantinea number 35 percent less overall than at Plataia and the Spartiates 58 percent fewer (considering the same ages). If one does not correct Thucydides, his smaller Spartan army at Mantinea would mean that the continuing damages from earthquake and revolt amounted to *c.* 71 percent of total Spartan manpower.

Even with Thucydides corrected, the reduction from Pylos to Mantinea was significant at *c.* 18–25 percent.⁵⁴ This reconstruction does coincide with other evidence from Thucydides, who stressed the damage of Attic raids and Messenian forays from Pylos, later from Kythera, and still later from Cape Malea.⁵⁵ The strong Spartan desire to achieve peace with Athens reflects this economic crisis.⁵⁶ Beyond direct damage to the productivity, the main effect

of these raids was to draw off vigorous helot workers, especially young men, indispensable for the workload of the *klēros*-system. So long as the traditional rents (for grain, at least, at the 50 percent rate) had to be levied to pay for Spartiate mess dues, the *klēros*-system did not have a large safety margin (Figueira (1984a) 105–6). Mantinea also reveals another negative trend, increasing dependence on the *perioikoi*: rising from 47–50 percent at Plataia to 72 percent at Mantinea. Inasmuch as their conditions of service approximated the Spartiates, perioikic infantrymen bore heavier *burdens* than hoplites in other *poleis*. A higher proportion of *perioikoi* meant that some had to stand further forward in the phalanx. As Sparta began to mobilize more year-classes for more intense service, perioikic hoplites had greater costs and dangers to bear without helot labor subsidizing them.

Aristotle notes how Spartiates lost their status on failure to pay their mess dues (*Pol.* 1271a26–37; 1272a13–16). Such disfranchised persons were termed *hypomeiones* (‘inferiors’).⁵⁷ Disruption of agricultural production was the principal cause for such arrears in mess contributions. The Spartiates appear adamant in their determination not to relax these requirements. One cause was perhaps the tendency in servile economies to trace problems with laborers to inadequacies of individual masters rather than to systemic flaws in dependency. If that were operative at Sparta after Pylos, it would suggest how far, under the influence of mid-fifth-century changes in land tenure, relations between helots and the owners of *klēroi* had evolved beyond the depersonalized exploitation described above. Second, our surviving sources are mute on what happened to the helots of persons losing mess membership and Spartiate status. *Hypomeiones* probably did not retain their helots, because that would breach the monopoly of the *Homoioi*, earned by martial *aretē*, over benefits from land and laborers. If their *klēros*-land and helots passed to their heirs, one can envisage why the less vulnerable disregarded the plight of the downwardly mobile. Those sympathetic would presumably have intervened to help tender mess dues of their kindred and friends before the crisis of default, so that those falling into arrears had already lost the safety net offered by others. Furthermore, Sparta began to use liberated helots as hoplites during the Archidamian War, not only to supplement manpower, but also as surrogates for citizens whom it preferred not to risk overseas.⁵⁸ Thus, for each *Hypomeiōn* there were potential *Neodamōdeis*, as manumitted ex-helot soldiers were eventually called, no matter whether these soldiers were enrolled from helots released by *Hypomeiones* or from volunteers from their masters’ most devoted, strongest dependents, who were replaced by the helots of degraded Spartiates. Some such hypothesis is required to explain how Sparta in the 420s could be short of helot workers and yet at the same time be enlisting helots as soldiers.⁵⁹

Hypomeiones were potentially a dangerous component of the community, as illustrated by the conspiracy in c.399 of Kinadon, a *Hypomeiōn* of

considerable ability who continued to serve the state after his degradation (Xen. *Hell.* 3.3.4–11). The *Hypomeiones* were probably ranked lower than *perioikoi* as second-class citizens, since the latter preserved rights in their communities, but the *Hypomeiones* could serve militarily, perhaps for compensation. Unknown is the scale of Kinadon's plot, which was uncovered by an informant in Kinadon's recruiting efforts.⁶⁰ Clearly he hoped to establish a political order with full participation by a wider circle than the Spartiates and with improved status for the helots, whom he expected to assist him.

Another controversy involves the *rhētra* ('law') of the ephor Epitadeus, a legislative act that supposedly freed Spartans from restrictions in alienation and bequest of property.⁶¹ Some consider it a fabrication (being in my view too skeptical).⁶² Plutarch mentions the *rhētra* as a cause for the social crisis prevailing (244–42) during the reign of a reforming Hellenistic king, Agis IV. Plutarch derived his treatment from a Hellenistic *politeia* of Sparta, perhaps that of the Stoic Sphairos.⁶³ Epitadeus' proposal is accorded a selfish motivation, estrangement from his son, and Plutarch correlated the *rhētra* with an upsurge in self-interested behavior, including intensified competition for status differentiation. A 'single-heir' system was supposedly discarded. Such lack of fidelity toward traditional *mores* and self-aggrandizement brought Sparta down. In the naive view that the causes of Spartan decline ran current with their most dramatic manifestations, some scholars date the *rhētra* to the fourth century. Yet a fourth-century *rhētra* cannot explain the problems of disfranchisements and of accelerating inequality in late-fifth-century Sparta.

The only Epitadas (the Laconian variant of Epitadeus) known is a Spartan commander who fell at Pylos in 424.⁶⁴ Yet a personalized explanation for the *rhētra* fails to account for its passage. Fathers disowning sons can never have been a substantial factor in the crisis. The 'single-heir' system of succession was a fantasy. It could only have been a dangerous aspiration – if applied, a chief result could have been a lowered birthrate – and never a genuine recollection of past 'family planning'. Rather than precipitating the decline of the *klēros*-system and the Lykourgan order, the *rhētra* of Epitadeus was probably meant as a remedy to early manifestations of inequality of property in the generation before Pylos. The *rhētra* served to free Spartiates to deploy their assets so as to ensure the status of all of those in affinity with them by managing division of inheritances, by dowering, or by gift giving. The practice of mentoring of poorer citizens as *mothōnes* also occurred in this period.⁶⁵

The size of dowries may already have been perceived as problematic, as Aristotle would later note (*Pol.* 1270a24–6). The social competition expressed by increasing dowries was the result of contention for the most elite husbands by upwardly mobile Spartiates, who benefited from the huge shift of assets after the earthquake (c.465) and ensuing rebellion. Not only was the *rhētra* of

Epitadeus a failure as a reform, but it may also have sharpened the emergent contention for upward mobility by putting more utensils in the toolkit of the ambitious (Figueira (1986) 193–5). Such aspirations toward upward mobility were out of harmony with the rigidity of the *klēros*-system.

The Peace of Nikias (421) and the shift of Athenian energies elsewhere, first in offense to Sicily and then defensively in the Aegean, superficially brought respite to Sparta. The army mobilized at the Battle of the Nemea River in 394 retrospectively illuminates Spartan losses after 421 (Figueira (1986) 199–206). That force indicates a 12 percent decline in Spartan numbers, a substantial reduction but one reflecting a slowing of the damage to the Spartan economy as Athens also weakened. The early fourth century saw intense military activity in the Greek homeland, so that many indications exist of deployments that illuminate the size of various units and their battle order. A major reorganization halved the number of *enōmotiai*, basic units, from 192 to 96 (Figueira (1986) 200–1), because Spartan numbers were inadequate for manning the larger number and carrying out a full range of tactical dispositions. The reorganization and preserved evidence on the size of Spartan *morai* ('regiments') are consistent with a period of stability followed by accelerated decline owed to fourth-century attrition. The Messenians – the liberated helots and their descendants – suffered a corresponding disaster, since they were uprooted not only from the Athenian-controlled enclaves in Lakōnikē, but even from Naupaktos, a haven since 455. They were scattered around Greece, with some withdrawing to Sicily.

The account by Xenophon of Spartan forces at Leuktra (371) is particularly valuable for containing an enumeration of the total forces and of the Spartiates in the four *morai* present.⁶⁶ The twenty-three years since the Nemea River marked another major decline in Spartan numbers, 36 percent since 394. The years after Mantinea (418) reveal a Spartiate decline of an astounding 58 percent. This reduction necessitated that five more age-classes were regularly mobilized. It turned the army into a force largely composed of *perioikoi* (about 70 percent), although the soldiers from the *perioikoi* were themselves much fewer, dropping 37 percent between Mantinea and Leuktra.⁶⁷ Manifestly, the early fourth century witnessed a continuation of Spartiate degradations, presumably through the widespread failure to tender mess dues. To achieve stability Spartiates not only needed to produce enough male offspring to replace themselves, but also to match that next generation with a sufficient supply of two inputs, land and helot workers, that themselves had to balance each other. And this goal had to be achieved without an administrative superstructure and without the application of management techniques.

Attrition from continual fighting played its role in the absence of any single disaster. Yet the acceleration of decline exhibits another demographic trend. The rate of Spartiate decline increases *c.*390 at just the point at which the

proportion of men born after 424 exceeded 50 percent of all males of an age for service. Thus Spartan family limitation probably factored alongside casualties and loss of citizenship (Figueira (1986) 203–4; (2003b) 224–7). Spartan parents may have feared for their sons’ prospects in a Lakōnikē under Attic pressure. Whether deliberately or instinctively, they reacted by applying the ‘single heir’ rule, of which the result was a population incapable of replacing itself. Any cushion that was provided by money and precious metals accumulated during the Ionian and Corinthian Wars would now have been exhausted. Simultaneously, the Spartans were using *perioikoi* more intensively, exposing them to greater mortality and damaging them economically. Naval war with Athens also affected the *perioikoi* since they suffered losses as trireme crews and marines. Population loss almost always means output loss in ancient *poleis*. The shrinkage of perioikic economies inevitably harmed even the more affluent of those bearing hoplite duties. Moreover, some helots were freed and elevated in status for naval service (Myron *FGrH* 106 F 1).

Leuktra was a battlefield manifestation of the manpower shortage that was affecting Lakōnikē (*oliganthrōpia*: Aris. *Pol.* 1270a34; cf. Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 1.1) and included its servile population. Our only datum on helot numbers is the 35,000 helots marched off to Plataia over a century earlier. In light of continuous reductions during the next hundred years through earthquake, revolt, withdrawal, flight, battle losses, and enfranchisements, the helots probably never again approached their acme of 479–65. The Theban general Epameinondas prevailed against a smaller Spartiate contingent in a smaller Spartan army at Leuktra (371), and would hardly have won at all or, at least not decisively, against the Spartans of Mantinea (418), let alone Plataia (479). So too his establishment of Messene would have had to surmount the resistance of many more Spartans, and he would have been challenged to integrate a larger indigenous population of liberated helots; instead Laconia seemed ‘deserted’ at the time of the first Theban invasion (Xen. *Hell.* 6.5.23, 25). Some Messenian helots and *perioikoi* rallied to refounded Messene, but Epameinondas gathered ‘Messenians’ and ordinary volunteers from abroad.⁶⁸

By the time of Leuktra, the natural, barter-based economy of archaic and early classical Lakōnikē lingered as nothing more than an ideological fiction. The Spartans managed logistics in Aiginetic coins that had even infiltrated the mess dues. Sparta had administered the costly Ionian War in monetary terms, largely Attic owls and associated coins of Attic allies (Figueira (1998) 469–76). After victory, the Spartans decided to maintain a state treasury for hegemonic purposes.⁶⁹ The notorious avarice exhibited by Spartan commanders and harpasts abroad was associated by observers such as Xenophon with the breakdown of the traditional ‘Lykourgan’ *diaita*, the self-denying and egalitarian pattern of consumption fostered by the traditional mess system (Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 14.1–7). Yet acquisitiveness overseas was a

logical response to the uncertainties of the domestic servile economy, where inequalities of land holding and access to laborers could be complicated by helot flight and noncompliance (Figueira (1986) 202). Spartiates were barred from licitly accumulating income by gainful activities within Lakōnikē, and were practically unable to work to supplement the production of their *klēros*-land. Reserves of coined money provided status insurance for themselves, sons, relatives, and friends. The reference by Theopompos (*FGrH* 115 F 178) to a *xenēlasia* in the 340s serving to remedy a crop failure demonstrates that a single market for foodstuffs had replaced the old politicized distributive system (Figueira (2003a) 68–70). Spartiates were using coins and other goods in an informal or ‘black’ economy, to cope with mess dues which were largely expressed in agricultural measures.

Leuktra imposed heavy casualties⁷⁰ and opened the path for the Thebans to attack Laconia, maul the *klēros*-system, and liberate many Messenian helots. Paradoxically, however, this catastrophe did not signify an immediate decline in manpower. The economic impact of an independent Messenian state lay not in further curtailment in Spartiate numbers, but rather in setting a ceiling for any demographic recovery (Figueira (1986) 207–10). The immediate reduction in Spartan forces after Leuktra was around 10 percent, and Sparta appears to have recouped in available troops in the next few years. This demographic resilience may be owed to the existence of many *Hypomeiones*, who continued to reside in Lakōnikē. With the loss of many Spartiates at Leuktra, these ‘Inferiors’ regained sufficient land to resume payment of mess dues and recover active citizenship. The components of the Spartan army facing Thebans and Arkadians in the years down to Second Mantinea (362) are not well attested. Yet Sparta apparently mounted forces comparable to its pre-Leuktra mobilizations. Sparta settled into the role of a secondary power after Mantinea, and focused on maintaining its boundaries with Argos, Arkadia, and Messene. Its overarching aspiration was to recover Messenian *klēros*-land. Reoccupying central Messenia, an enormous enterprise, would not, however, have permitted reinstallation of thousands of *klēroi* there, as fourth-century conditions would not have provided an appreciable mass of laborers. The great reservoir of helot labor of archaic and early classical Sparta was irrecoverable.

The mid-fourth century provides a backdrop for Aristotle’s negative remarks in the *Politics*. His criticism of the conditions of land tenure and arrangements for subsidizing the messes (where he contrasts the Cretan practice of drawing on public revenues) misses how the traditional system had integrated the *agōgē*, rents, mess dues, and redistribution (1270a15–39, 1271a26–37). Yet his critique was surely valid for the fourth-century messes, where loss of civil rights accompanied an invidious game of upward mobility for the survivors amid intensifying inequality. Aristotle criticized the laxness of rules controlling the alienation of property. He does not reflect that contemporary

arrangements were probably designed, albeit unsuccessfully, to compensate for the unevenness both in access to and control of *klēros*-land and in the supply of helot workers. Disequilibrium emerged when the archaic agrarian regime was unbalanced by the Great Earthquake (c.465).

Aristotle cites the scale of dowries and competition for heiresses, observing that 40 percent of Spartiate property was in women's hands. He stressed the *oliganthrōpia* ('shortage of manpower') of a state with vast arable lands which he thought capable of supporting 1,500 cavalry and 30,000 hoplites, but which in his day sustained a tiny population of less than 1,000 citizens (1270a29–31) (cf. Cawkwell (1983)). Certainly, high fourth-century mortality in battle was a factor here. It generated many female inheritors in high demand by suitors. Nonetheless, it is also conceivable that other factors promoted a movement of property into women's hands. Except for the mess dues, no evidence survives on the mechanisms by which the Spartan government assigned taxes and liturgies based on agricultural production. Some advantage for female property holders may well have existed.⁷¹ Women did not pay mess dues, so that they did not risk loss of citizenship over arrears. If helots were stripped from those dropping out of the messes, women could have safely preserved their holdings. Aristotle puts much blame on Spartan women for the decline of Lykourgan austerity. In terms of our reconstruction, they were important agents in the sharpening drive for upward mobility that started in the mid-fifth century. The tools for this competition probably included family limitation, amassing and pursuing large dowries, and marriage politics.

The later fourth century saw Sparta continue on its downward spiral. Its kings adopted the pretensions of Hellenistic monarchy; they presided, with a small elite, over a community comprising various strata of the disfranchised, including helots. Only seven hundred adult male citizens remained, of whom only one hundred eventually possessed a *klēros* by the period of Agis IV (Plut. *Agis* 5.4). That meant sufficient land and helots to contribute traditional mess dues. The traditional *syssitia* no longer operated, and their Hellenistic counterparts were mechanisms by which the elite patronized the impoverished *damos* with subsidies (Phylarchos *FGrH* 81 F 43) (Figueira 2004b.57–59). Each ephor may have presided over one of a handful of large messes. There is some evidence that the kings exercised special control of the helots, whom they could grant to foreign allies for the cultivation of gift estates (Stephanos, fr. 1, *PCG* 8.614–15). This was the situation in the 240s when Agis IV was contemplating his reforms (Marasco (1981/83) 1.211–16).

22.6 Conclusion

The Spartan sociopolitical dispensation has wielded enormous influence over

western ideas on constructing a just social order. Despite our admiration for Spartan accomplishments, it is probably fairer to judge this influence a pernicious legacy, deserving a place alongside chattel slavery. One needs, however, to transcend a ready, if justified, condemnation of Spartan cruelty toward, and exploitation of, the helots to appreciate this fully. In the late seventh century, the Spartans created an innovative polity that dealt with prevailing tensions over the social and political predominance of an inherited aristocracy, over how far different social groups might vary in their lifestyles, and over the legitimacy or even feasibility of social mobility. Their response was to suppress differentiation, re-stage mobility in the circumscribed social spaces of the *agōgē*, messes, and army, and politicize acquisition and consumption. The Spartans integrated their body politic by reducing material life to formulae of extraction and redistribution. *Klēroi* were allotted and reallocated, rents collected from the helots, contributions paid into *syssitia*, and surplus food either circulated from the messes or were used to barter in a vast exercise in suppressing manifestations of individualistic and opportunistic behavior. Through the creation of the Peloponnesian League, this system was progressively insulated politically from more differentiated, less static societies emerging elsewhere, and isolated economically through prohibition of precious metals, iron money, and the recourse to *xenēlasia* ('expulsion of foreigners'). When Sparta was crowned with an unlikely total victory over Athens in 404, the stage was set for its empire in political theory. That hegemony over theory distorted contemporary political options and tainted recollection of archaic social integration. It lasted much longer than the military hegemony won at Aigospotamoi in 405, for it appeared to have conquered not only the Athenians, but *homo oeconomicus* himself.

Helotage inspired Plato and Aristotle to favor polities with caste-like divisions, between those fulfilling merely economic roles and the military and political segments of society. Theorists were accordingly less welcoming of the market economy, economic differentiation and integration, democracy, and more individually-centered visions of civic life. Furthermore, theorists could promote their more truly communistic systems by adducing the communally mediated flows of material goods in Lakōnikē, the public-spiritedness of the earlier Spartans, and the principle of interchangeability in which any citizen could be replaced by his fellow. Such hints fell on fertile soil among modern thinkers. Naturally, the technological and social circumstances differed so radically between Sparta's politicized economy and Marxist, Leninist, and Maoist command economies that the real relevance of ancient Sparta to these modern totalitarian regimes may be slight. Sparta does, however, provide some important parallels in its defiance of market forces and its masking of incentives toward more efficient uses of resources. Finally, it is in the politicization of Spartan life and not in 'communism' *per se* that the grounds to explore such convergences may be found.

A careful reading of Spartan demographic history indicates that the injuries dealt Sparta in the 420s by Athenian military activity, coming as they did only a generation after the shocks of the earthquake and helot revolt, mortally wounded this political economy. The process of disfranchisement amid intense conflict was promoted by a reignited struggle for upward mobility. Modest initiatives toward liberalization of the Spartiate *oikonomia*, however intended, such as the *rhētra* of Epitadeus, were bound to fail as half-measures because they adjusted a thoroughly politicized economy only at its margins. Sparta was unlucky in having Athens as adversary, because any opening toward reform threatened a plunge toward a democratic, money-based society. Disfranchisement worsened the *oliganthrōpia* that rendered Sparta incapable of sustaining hegemonic ambitions. That the Athenians failed to discern the extent of the wounds they had dealt and subsequently embarked on foreign policy adventures (not only profoundly risky, but also extraordinarily unlucky) qualifies as one of history's great ironies.

However, it must stand alongside another irony that the final assessment of helotage charts its impact most clearly on the Spartiates, not on the helots themselves. That historiographical displacement is a product of the exploitation that left them nameless and largely unattested, save for the record of their victimization and the inverted image of the Spartiate ethos that was imposed on them. Those helots who found voice for themselves did so through an exercise in ethnogenesis as Messenians. Those who achieved liberation from servility through elevation as Spartans are totally mute.

'Lykourgan' Sparta was, nevertheless, a remarkable social experiment, albeit an outlier in Greek institutionalization, and one that proved a dead end in terms of applied paradigm. Laconizers may well have paraded their adherence to Spartan values and behavior and on the level of the individual such imitation had psychological relevance. But such Laconism was a contradiction in terms, because true adaptation could only be enacted on the *polis* level, and not on that of the individual *politēs*. One could never truly be individually Spartan. Moreover, the archaic Spartans would have had little in common in spirit with the anti-democratic partisans who were the most ardent supporters of classical Sparta, such as the factionalists so vividly portrayed in Thucydides' description of the *stasis* on Kerkyra or the die-hards among the followers of the Thirty Tyrants at Athens. What common ground exists here would lie between those exploiting earthquake and revolt to climb upward or the greedy harmosts and the allied extremists whom Lysandros installed as *decarchs*.

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FURTHER READING

For a basic view on the helots (and on fifth-century Sparta), consider the discussion in G.E.M. de Ste. Croix, (1972), *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War*, London. The most systematic treatment is J. Ducat (1990), *Les Hilotes*, *BCH Supp.* 20, Paris, and useful also are the contributions in N. Luraghi and S. Alcock, eds (2003), *Helots and their Masters in Laconia and Messenia: Histories, Ideologies, Structures*. Washington, DC. On the roots of helotage, consider S. Link, 'Snatching and Keeping. The Motif of Taking in Spartan Culture' in Figueira, ed., *Spartan Society*, 2004, Swansea, 1–24. Paul Cartledge is the leading contemporary Anglophone student of Sparta: his *Sparta and Lakonia: A Regional History 1300 to 362 BC²*. 1st edn (1979), 2nd edn (2002), London and New York, is an important overview, and his (1987), *Agisilaos and the Crisis of Sparta*, London, is a detailed discussion of classical Sparta. I note three of my works on economics: (1984) 'Mess Contributions and Subsistence at Sparta', *TAPA* 114, 84–109; (1986) 'Population Patterns in Late Archaic and Classical Sparta', *TAPA* 116, 165–213; (2004) 'The Nature of the Spartan *Klēros*', in Figueira, ed., *Spartan Society*, Swansea, 47–76. A reconstruction along different principles is provided in S. Hodkinson (2000), *Property and Wealth in Classical Sparta*, Swansea and London. On the helot creation of a Messenian identity, see Figueira (1999), 'The Evolution of the Messenian Identity', in S. Hodkinson and A. Powell, eds, *Sparta: New Perspectives*, Swansea, 211–44; N. Luraghi (2008), *The Ancient Messenians: Constructions of Ethnicity and Memory*, Cambridge, MA. For the helots, Spartan religion, and state security: A. Powell (2010), 'Divination, Royalty and Insecurity in Classical Sparta', in S. Hodkinson and A. Powell, eds (2010), *Sparta: The Body Politic*, Swansea, 85–135.

NOTES

- 1 Figueira (2004b) 47, 66 (n. 1). For those envisaging a Sparta that diverged from the institutions of other city-states, see, e.g., Manso (1800–5) 1.118–28; Toynbee (1969) 201–2, 223–5, 230–3, 301–9. For those who emphasize Spartan convergences with other *poleis*, see, e.g., Grote (1872) 2.310–36; Hodkinson (2000) 187–208.

- 2 See Figueira (2004a) and Figueira (2016), also see below.
- 3 For brief overview, see de Ste. Croix (1972) 89–95. Ducat (1990) represents the most thorough assessment.
- 4 This massacre is often dated in the 420s: e.g., Harvey (2004) 200–2; for the period 451–47: Figueira (1986) 186; (2003b) 224–5.
- 5 For Sparta: Huxley (1962) 13–25; Kiechle (1963) 95–115.
- 6 See Ducat (this volume, [Chapter 23](#)).
- 7 E.g., Finley (1973) 63–4; Austin and Vidal-Naquet (1977) 86–90; Wiedemann (1981) 36–44.
- 8 Antiochos *FGrH* 555 F 14; Hellanikos *FGrH* 4 F 188 = 323a F 29; Ephoros *FGrH* 70 F 117; Theopompos *FGrH* 115 F 13, cf. F 122a; cf. Paus. 3.20.6; *ΣPlato Alkib.* I.122d; *EM* s.v. Εἰλωτες 300.7–15 Gaisford.
- 9 See, e.g., Chrimes (1949) 284–5; Huxley (1962) 75; Ducat (1990) 7–18; Cartledge 2002, 83–4.
- 10 *Xenia* ‘guest/gift friendship’ was the characteristic form of Dark Age/Early Archaic (850–600) inter-community relations that were mediated through inherited friendships among elite males who visited or hosted each other and exchanged gifts as tokens of mutual honor.
- 11 E.g., Chrimes (1949) 285–7; Toynbee (1969) 199, cf. 210, 223–4; Hodkinson (1986) 388–89; Nafissi (1991) 99–108.
- 12 From *spartós* ‘sown’, but with a change in accent. Compare the *Spartoií* (‘sown men’) who are known from Theban mythology as the aristocratic lineages arising from the earthborn men who grew from the dragon’s teeth sown by the founding hero Kadmos. The myth supported a claim of autochthonous or indigenous status for elite Thebans.
- 13 Sosibios *FGrH* 595 F13 with Paus. 3.10.6, 3.15–2–9, 3.19.7; cf. 2.2.2, 3.26.6, 5.3.1, Apollod. *Biblio.* 2.7.3–4. Spartan kingship, however, was also legitimized from the pre-Dorian Atreidai as shown by the cult in the Menelaion.
- 14 That the non-royal Heraklid Lysandros tried to open the kingship to all Heraklids (in one version), supporting himself on both traditional and fabricated oracular material, indicates that this elevation of the royal houses did not appear unassailable, even as late as the early fourth century (Plut. *Lys.* 24.4–26.4, 30.3–4, with Ephoros *FGrH* 70 F 207; cf. Plut. *Ages.* 8.3).
- 15 Cf. Lukermann and Moody (1978) 92–5; McDonald and Coulson (1983)

- 326; Spencer (1998).
- 16 Figueira (1999) 225–9.
- 17 Hdt. 6.23.2–24; Thuc. 6.4.6; Strabo 6.1.6 C257; Paus. 4.23.6–10. See Luraghi 2008, 147–72.
- 18 In general, see Kahrstedt (1919); Buckler (1977); Cozzoli (1979); Ducat (1983); Cartledge (1987) 166–74; (2002), 142–5; Papazoglou (1993); Lazenby (1995).
- 19 Figueira (2015); with (1991) 57–62, 73–4; (2008) 440–2.
- 20 Direct evidence is admittedly late archaic or classical, but does encompass not only democratic Athenians (e.g., Thuc. 3.50.2), but also oligarchic Corinthians (Thuc. 1.27.1–2, 29.1) and the Spartans themselves (Thuc. 3.92.4–5, 93.2; Diod. Sic. 12.59.3–5).
- 21 Polyb. 6.45.3–4, based on Ephoros (*FGrH* 70 F 148); cf. Just. 3.3.3.
- 22 Figueira (1984a) 100–2; (2003b) 199–201; cf. Hodkinson (2000) 131–45; Catling (2002) 161–3, 193–5.
- 23 We should not forget that Aristotle in his *Politics* offers a different understanding of Spartan land tenure. Its relation to the rest of the source material and how it enhances our treatment is discussed later in this chapter.
- 24 Isok. 12.255 with Figueira (1986) 170, (2003b) 223.
- 25 Figueira (2004b) 62–3. See also Ducat (1983) 145, 151; Hodkinson (2000) 74–81.
- 26 Plut. *Mor.* 238E (cf. *Lyk.* 16.1), which is derived from a constitutional work on Sparta (possibly that of the Stoic Sphairos) and ultimately descends from the work of Aristotle on the Spartan constitution. See Figueira (2004b) 51–2, 55–6. While passage of the *agōgē* constituted a requirement for *klēros* possession, Plut. *Lyk.* 16.1 places the initial allocation of the *klēroi* in infancy.
- 27 Figueira (2004b) 63–4. See also Hodkinson (2000) 400–5.
- 28 I emphasize that the vulnerability of the system to disruption, as much as the threat of outright revolt, caused the famous Spartan anxiety over the helots. See Thuc. 4.80.2–4; Kritias fr. 37 DK; Plato *Laws* 698E; Aris. *Pol.* 1269a37–b5. Cf. Roobaert (1977); Baltrusch (2001).
- 29 Whether these measures are Attic or Laconian is uncertain (Figueira (2003b) 201–2).

- 30 Cf. Figueira (2003b) 216–220.
- 31 See Figueira (2003b) 219. Cf. Hunt (1997); van Wees (2004) 181–2, for the view that the helot muster did have military value.
- 32 For Messenia, see McDonald and Hope Simpson (1972) 144–5, maps 8–15–17; for possible traces of the evolution at Kelephina, see Catling (2002) 168, 249, with Cavanagh et al. (1996) 285.
- 33 Or to be more specific, a helot could not amass such resources before the third century, when Sparta had a monetary economy, as illustrated by the 6,000 helots prepared to pay 500 drachmas (a considerable sum) for their freedom in 223.
- 34 Hodkinson (1986). Cf. Figueira (2002b).
- 35 In addition to the authorities of n.18 above, note Ducat (1990) 61–2; Singor (1993) 45–6.
- 36 Crete: Aris. *Pol.* 1272a16–21; Dosiadas *FGrH* 458 F 2; Tiryns: Verdelis et al. (1975). See Figueira (1984a) 97–8.
- 37 Figueira (1984a) 91–5 suggests that annual mess dues were equivalent in value to 1278–1478 kg. of wheat. Figueira (2003b) 217 offers even higher estimates (up to 2880 kg. of wheat).
- 38 Kritias fr. 6W, *FHG* 2.68, fr. 2; Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 5.4, 7; Plut. *Lyk.* 12.14.
- 39 Plut. *Lyk.* 28.8–9; *Demetr.* 1.5; *Mor.* 239A. Cf. Ducat (1974) 1455–8.
- 40 Figueira (1984a) 96–7; (2003b) 207–10.
- 41 Figueira (1984a) 103–4; Hodkinson (1992).
- 42 Other treatments: Busolt (1905); Ziehen (1933); Toynbee (1969); Lazenby (1985).
- 43 Cavanagh et al. (1996) 321–3; Catling (2002) 168–9, 183.
- 44 Hdt. 6.120; cf. Isok. 4.87. See Figueira (1986) 169.
- 45 Hdt. 7.202, 205.2 with Figueira (2006) 61–2.
- 46 Figueira (2003b) 217–20; cf. Grundy (1908) 81; Cartledge (1987) 174; Talbert (1989) 23.
- 47 The archaeological evidence is not sufficiently detailed to confirm the population figures implied by Herodotos for Plataia (Hdt. 9.10.1, 11.3, 28.2; cf. 7.103.3: 5,000 Spartiates, 5,000 *perioikoi*, 35,000 helots), but the conclusions of Catling (2002) 206–7 note the classical falloff in population in the Laconia survey area (cf. pp. 249–50 for changes at Chrysapha).

- 48 Figueira (1999) 225–32; cf. Figueira (2010). See also Alcock (1999); Luraghi (2001) 293–301; Luraghi (2008) 173–208. On the Messenian folk hero Aristomenes, see Ogden (2004).
- 49 Luraghi (2008) disputes this view, but note Figueira (1999) 211–13; Figueira (2010).
- 50 See Figueira (1986) 177–9, 181–7; Hodkinson (2000) 417–23.
- 51 Aris. *apud* Herakleides Lembos fr. 12 (Dilts); Plut. *Mor.* 238E; cf. Myron *FGrH* 106 F2. Cf. Lazenby (1995); Lupi (2003).
- 52 Thuc. 4.80.3–4; cf. Plut. *Lyk.* 28.6; Diod. *Sic.* 12.67.3–4. See Figueira (1986) 186.
- 53 The critical assumption (widely accepted) is that the garrison at Sphakteria (420) was formed from one *enōmotia* (of 35) from each of 12 *lokhoi*. See Figueira (1986) 175–7, with full bibliography including Chrimes (1949) 388–91; Toynbee (1969) 319, 368–77; Lazenby (1985) 114.
- 54 The maximum number for the Spartiates at Pylos appears to be *c.*2755 and the Spartiate force at Mantinea (with Thucydides’ number of *lokhoi* doubled!) fell within a range *c.*2086–2251.
- 55 Thuc. 4.41.2–3, 6.1–2; 5.14.3, 56.2–3. See Powell (2001) 234–6.
- 56 Thuc. 4.81.2, cf. 4.108.7; 4.117.1–2, cf. 5.15.1–2; 4.119.9–10; 5.7–11, cf. 5.13.2; 5.14.3–4, cf. 5.15.1, 17.1.
- 57 Xen. *Hell.* 3.3.6, 11; cf. Thuc. 5.34.2; also 4.41.3, 55.1.
- 58 Thuc. 5.34.1; also Xen. *Hell.* 3.3.6; Hesych. s.v. δαμῶδεις; νεοδαμῶδεις; ΣThuc.5.34.1; Poll. 3.83; Myron *FGrH* 106 F 1; Dio Chrys. 36.38. Previously helots were employed as hoplite attendants or as light skirmishers, as at Sepeia (492) or Plataia (479). In general, see Welwei (1974) 142–58.
- 59 It is unlikely that the massacre of helots described in Thuc. 4.80. 2–4 belongs in the 420s, despite Thucydides’ mentioning it while discussing Spartan reactions to Pylos. See Figueira (1986) 186. For recent discussions, see Harvey 2004; Paradiso 2004.
- 60 Powell (2010) 117–21 sees the plot as a ploy by King Agesilaos to augment his authority, but Powell rightly points out to me that such a hypothesis would add credibility to the background details, which must have been fabricated for their plausibility.
- 61 Plut. *Agis* 5.3. See Figueira (2004b) 50–1.

- 62 Contrast Ducat (1983) 159; Cartledge (1987) 167–9; Schütrumpf (1987); Hodkinson (2000) 93–4 with Toynbee (1969) 337–43; Christien (1974).
- 63 Figueira (2004a) 151–2; Figueira (2016) 28–9.
- 64 Thuc. 4.8.9, 31.2, 33.1, 38.1.
- 65 Plut. *Lys.* 2.1–2; Ael. *VH* 12.43; Phylarchos *FGrH* 81 F 43; cf. Isok. 4.111.
- 66 Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.12–15. Figueira (1986) 206–7.
- 67 Figueira (1986) 198–9; for later declines pp. 204–5.
- 68 Diod. Sic. 16.66.1, 3; Paus. 4.27.4–11, with Figueira (1999) 219–21; Luraghi (2008) 209–48.
- 69 Plut. *Lys.* 17.5–6 with Ephoros *FGrH* 70 F 205; Theopompos *FGrH* 115 F332. See Figueira (2002a) 141–3.
- 70 Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.15: 400 Spartiates dead out of 700 present (perhaps c.1,333 for Spartiates 20+) and 400 other Spartans. Diod. Sic. 15.56.4 has 4000 dead. See Figueira (1986) 206–8.
- 71 Aristotle did observe that the Spartans pay and supervise military levies badly (*Pol.* 1271b11–15).

CHAPTER 23

The *Perioikoi*

Jean Ducat

(Translated by Anton Powell)

With the opening words of his *Lakedaimonion Politeia* (“Constitution of the Lakedaimonians”), Xenophon highlights the paradox which Sparta presented to other Greeks:

What really amazed me about Sparta was realising that it has one of the smallest citizen populations of any city-state, and yet this has not prevented it from emerging clearly as the most powerful, and the best-reputed, state in Greece ...

And yet, in the rest of this text Xenophon’s approach – singing the praises of the laws of Lykourgos while restricting himself to matters internal to Sparta itself – has led him to say nothing about one of the main reasons for Sparta’s power: the *perioikis*. This term refers to the political entity formed by the communities of *perioikoi* (“dwellers around”). Without this entity, Sparta would have been – in spite of “Lykourgos” – no more than an average power.

Modern historians, like their ancient counterparts, are agreed in defining the *perioikoi* as the class of men who, when added to the Spartans themselves, formed the community of *Lakedaimonians*. Several ancient texts are particularly clear on this point. In Herodotus (7.234) the exiled Spartan king Damaratos says to the Persian ruler Xerxes, after the battle of Thermopylai:

“O King, the Lakedaimonians are large in their population, and numerous are their cities ... And there is in Lakedaimon one city, Sparta, possessed of about eight thousand warriors. All of them are similar to the men who have fought here. As for the other Lakedaimonians, they are different from the Spartans, but they are brave nevertheless.”

Similarly clear statements are made by Thucydides (4.8.1) and Xenophon (*Hell.* 6.4.15). To put it in formulaic terms, Sparta + *perioikis* = Lakedaimon.

But what exactly *were* the perioikic communities? Were they city-states, or were they communities without political independence which were no more than small towns or villages (*kōmai*) within a Lakedaimonian state? In modern scholarship on the subject, by far the prevailing view is that the *perioikoi* lived in city-states, but the opposite view still has proponents (Eremin (2002); Mertens (2002)). The question is therefore worth investigating now. And in the view of the present writer, it can be answered

decisively.

23.1 The Perioikic City-states

Scholars have collected the ancient evidence – of varying value – for the political status of individual perioikic communities, from literary texts and from inscriptions (Shipley (1997); Hansen (2004)). The clearest evidence concerns the island of Kythera: namely, the fact that Aristotle wrote a text entitled “Constitution (*Politeia*) of the Kytherans”. If Kythera had a *politeia*, necessarily it was a *polis*, a city-state. Also helpful, though slightly less so, is the fact that individual *perioikoi*, when named in official records of other communities, are referred to not only by their personal names but also by their “ethnic”, the name of their community (e.g. “Asinaios”, “of Asine”). The largest such category consists of proxeny decrees: that is, inscriptions recording that certain individuals are, within their home communities, the official representatives (*proxenoi*) of another community. The places referred to by such “ethnics” are: Asine in Messenia, Epidauros, Kyphanta, Oinous, Pellana and Kythera. Less compelling, though still significant, evidence is the fact that other, unofficial, kinds of text – funerary inscriptions and literary works – use such “ethnics”: the individuals concerned are from Aithaia, Asine (Asine in Messenia in some cases, and in others possibly Asine in Laconia), Aulon, Thouria, Aigys, Chen and Kythera. Finally, the authors of some texts from the classical period refer to a perioikic community as a *polis*: the places concerned are Asine, Mothone, Anthana, Boia, Epidauros, Gytheion (?), Kythera, Las, Oitylos, Prasiai, Side, Tainaron and Thyrea. The value of this last kind of evidence varies greatly, depending on how reliable in general is the author in question and in what context the information occurs. Taken together, these various categories of evidence do not quite settle the general question of whether perioikic communities were *poleis*. But they do clearly point to an answer. Given that Kythera for certain was a *polis*, and that Asine, Epidauros, Kyphanta, Oinous and Pellana almost certainly were, it would be rash indeed to suppose that the same status was not enjoyed by some, at least, of the other perioikic communities.

Moving now to Greek texts which refer to the perioikic communities *en bloc*, as a special category, we find that these communities are always referred to as *poleis*. Thus on one occasion (5.54.1–2) Thucydides simply calls them “the city-states” (*poleis*). Xenophon writes as follows: “the perioikic city-states” (*Lak. Pol.* 15.3; *Ages.* 2.24); “[Agesilaos] sent the *perioikoi* back to their own city-states” (*Hell.* 6.5.21), and “the perioikic [*poleis*]” (*hai perioikides*, *Hell.* 3.5.7). In such expressions the word *polis* does not have the same meaning as it would have if a particular community were referred to in passing as a *polis*. The collective character of the term implies that the writer believes that there

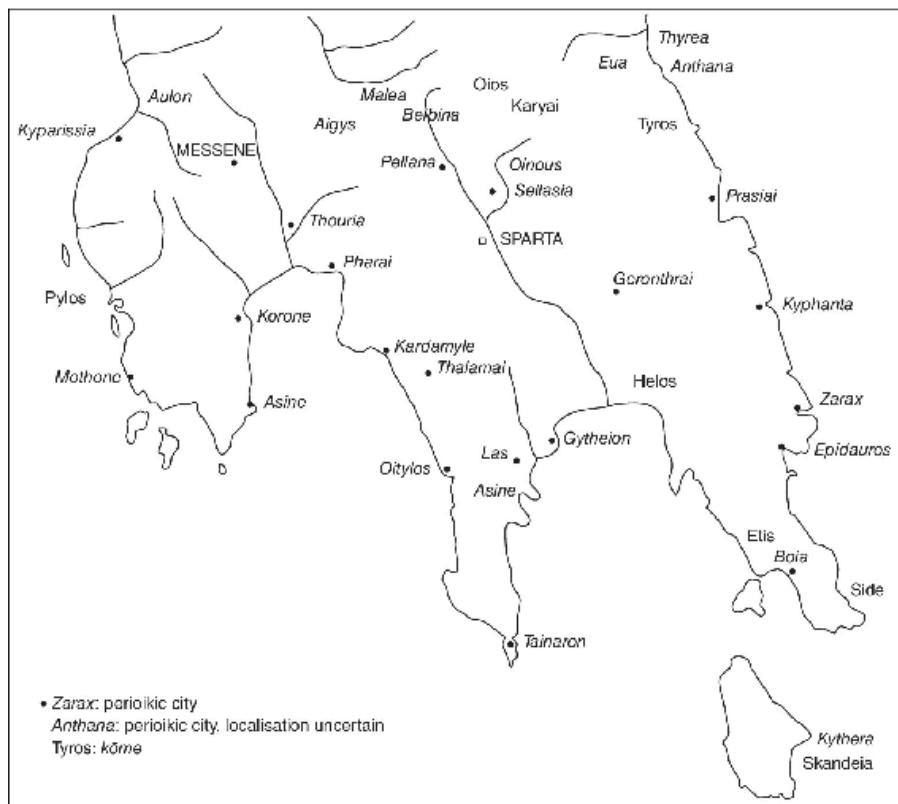
existed a normal status for a perioikic community, and that this status was that of a *polis*. Also, while in phrases such as those just quoted there are several instances of formulae such as *hai perioikides poleis* (“the perioikic city-states”), we never meet any such expression as *hai perioikides kōmai* (“the perioikic villages”).

Finally, there are two texts where the perioikic city-states, viewed as a whole rather than being identified individually, are described in a way which reveals what the authors thought of them. First, there is the passage of Herodotus with which we began (7.234). Damaratos is seeking to explain to Xerxes what kind of opponents the Lakedaimonians will be: first, how many of them remain after Thermopylai, and second whether those who do remain will prove as effective warriors as those the Great King has just had to deal with. To the first question, his answer is that the Lakedaimonians as a whole form a large mass, while to the second question his response involves making a distinction between the Spartiates and “the others”. Taking together his two expressions, “the Lakedaimonians have numerous *polies*” and “there is in Lakedaimon one *polis*, Sparta, which boasts some eight thousand warriors”, we see that, as regards having the status of city-state, Herodotus puts the Spartans and “the other Lakedaimonians” on the same level. He does not say “In Lakedaimon there is only one city-state, Sparta, and all the other concentrations of population are mere *kōmai* (villages)”: in fact, he says the exact opposite, that Lakedaimon has many cities, of which Sparta is one. He focuses on the latter alone, not on the grounds that it is more of a city-state than the others but because it is the only one to have eight thousand warriors “similar” to those at Thermopylai.

Our second text is perhaps even more explicit. Isokrates, writing c.342–339, describes what he sees as the appalling way in which the Spartiates have treated, and continue to treat, their *perioikoi* (*Panath.* 177ff.). In his eminently partisan view, the origins of the sad condition of the *perioikoi* go back to a distant era in which there was violent conflict between the aristocracy and the *dēmos*. The aristocracy won, and subsequently obliged the former *dēmos* to live separately from the aristocracy, and as inferiors. “They split up the mass of the people into groups as small as possible, and settled them in a large number of locations with inadequate amounts of land. Officially these were called ‘city-states’, but their real significance is less than that of the demes we have here at Athens” (*Panath.* 179). Among the various forms of injustice practised by the Spartiates against those they had made their *perioikoi*, Isokrates emphasizes in particular the techniques used to prevent perioikic societies enjoying a normal form of development. Isokrates’ very bias makes it clear that it was impossible to deny that the *perioikoi* had their own *poleis*: if he could have claimed as much, he certainly would have done. Instead, his case is: the *perioikoi* do indeed live in *poleis* but that term is a sham. These so-called *poleis* are in reality so small as to be inferior in importance

(*dynamis*, a term which includes both size of population and political influence) to the demes of Attike. His term “inferior” is no doubt an exaggeration, but in other respects the facts related by Isokrates seem beyond dispute. What can be disputed is the interpretation he puts on those facts, in claiming that the smallness of the perioikic city-states was the result of deliberate contrivance by the Spartiates. We note that he does *not* say that the perioikic communities had a *status* like that of the Attic demes, that they were thus no more than sub-divisions of the city-state of Sparta (as the demes were of the Athenian state). In fact he says the opposite: that the perioikic communities *are* city-states, and it is precisely this which makes Sparta’s behaviour towards them unacceptable. Sparta, in order to dominate them, had prevented them from enjoying the process of development which was normal for city-states.

How many perioikic *poleis* were there? Lists of such were compiled from the end of the fourth century onwards. They involved some one hundred names, but not all of these corresponded to actual *poleis*. (Shipley (1997) in his catalogue of perioikic *poleis* from all periods including Homeric and legendary times has ninety-five items.) For the classical period the number of perioikic communities which may have been *poleis* can be estimated at around sixty. Of these, we have evidence of *polis* status in the case of twenty-three – though these were not necessarily the most important communities at the time. Many others have left no such evidence. About half of these sixty communities can be firmly located (see [Map 23.1](#)).



Map 23.1 Laconia and Messenia: map of perioikic communities mentioned in this chapter.

What kind of life and culture existed in a perioikic city-state is hard to determine. Were these *poleis* all like miniature Spartas, or how did they differ? There is some evidence that the perioikic communities in Laconia (Oionous, Pellana, Geronthrai, Sellasia, Gytheion, Las) or nearby (Tainaron, Thalamai) had been so much under Sparta's influence as to resemble her in fundamental respects such as political institutions and social structure. Perioikic cities on the east coast, separated from Sparta by the massive Parnon range of mountains and for long dominated politically by Argos, were importantly different. These were Thyrea, Anthana, Eua, Prasiai, Kyphanta, Zarax and Epidauros. Most of them were essentially maritime communities and probably differed from Sparta in their political, economic and social arrangements. A third category is formed by the cities of Messenia, such as Kardamyle, Pharai, Thouria, Korone, Asine, Mothone, Kyparissia and Aulon. We know practically nothing of their internal arrangements in the classical period.

Not every perioikic community mentioned in our literary and epigraphic sources amounted to a *polis*: some were mere *kōmai* ("villages") (Hansen (1995) 74, n.122; (2004) 156). We know that there were *kōmai* in the territory

of Sparta, but they are not our concern here. The villages which matter for present purposes are those which belonged to perioikic *poleis* sufficiently important to include such. We hear, in three lines of a lost comedy of the poet Stephanos (fourth–third centuries BC), of a *kōmē* which had belonged to Thouria but which a king (probably Philip II of Macedon) had separated off, in order to confer it on one of his favourites (Kassel-Austin *PCG* 7 (1989), p. 615). The *polis* of Boia, the territory of which was extensive, seems to have included several *kōmai*: Etis, Aphroditia and Side. Thucydides (4.54.1, 4) reports that Kythera (itself a *polis*, as we have seen, and with its urban centre in the interior of the island) had a *kōmē* named Skandeia on the sea. A final, untypical, case is that of the Skiritai, who seem not to have lived in *poleis*, but to have formed an *ethnos* and to have lived in *kōmai*: of these, we know the names of Oios and Karyai.

A profound break in the history of perioikic territory occurred in 369, with the invasion of Lakedaimonian territory by Thebes. To the west of Mount Taygetos first: not only was Messene refounded as a *polis*, but the surrounding region was largely or entirely reorganized. The details, however, are disputed. From the time that the question was first raised (by Kuhn in 1878), scholars have disagreed on when the structure changed and on how the new Messenia was organized. Some (such as Shipley (2004) 562) believe that Messenia became a federal state controlled by the city of Messene – on the lines of the Boiotian confederacy which was controlled by Thebes. Others (such as Christien (1998) 460–1) see Messenia, while still dominated by Messene, as having been a more informal structure, on the lines of the Lakedaimonian *perioikis*. As to dating: were the main changes the work of the Theban Epameinondas in 369/8 or of Philip of Macedon in 338/7? That question applies particularly to the *poleis* around the Messenian Gulf: Philip, it may seem, was instigator of the main change here. But the change was not total: Asine and Mothone probably continued to be part of the Lakedaimonian sphere.

To the east of Mount Taygetos, there is corresponding uncertainty as to how the *perioikis* developed after 369. In general terms, the status of perioikic cities appears to have remained unchanged until 195, when it was abolished by the Roman Flamininus. There was, however, instability in certain places. The frontier with Arcadia had been brought very close to Sparta following the Theban invasion, but later receded northwards as Sparta managed to regain part of its lost territory. In 338/7, however, Sparta again lost land in this area (Shipley (2000) 370–5). East of Mount Parnon, even less is known about the development of Sparta's frontier with Argos: throughout the third century control of the coastal settlements was disputed between the two powers.

In Shipley's view ((2000) 376–7), the Thyreatis region passed into the control of Argos in 338/7. A dedication surviving at Delphi, made by the inhabitants of Tyros, shows that in 277 Tyros (which refers to itself as a *kōmē* and not as

a *polis*) was still part of the Lakedaimonian sphere: the same must therefore have been true of those communities further south than Tyros, and thus nearer to Sparta. On the other hand, Polybios (4.36.4–5) refers to places in the same region – Polichna, Prasiai, Leukai, Kyphanta, Glympeis and Zarax – as being under the control of Argos in 219 BC.

23.2 The Perioikic Cities, Independence and Dependence: The Military Aspects

Perioikic communities were, then, *poleis* but their sovereignty was not complete. In certain crucial respects, they were politically under the control of Sparta. Foreign policy and war are the most obvious areas of this dependence. But, in addition, aspects of the cities' internal affairs were dictated by Sparta. Which aspects were concerned, and how far this Spartan control extended, we shall now discuss. Our evidence, however, is often fragmentary in the extreme: the independence or otherwise of the *perioikoi* is not a field for definitive answers.

Isokrates, in a text generally and intensely hostile to Sparta and written c.342–39, devotes several paragraphs to showing how the Spartans managed first to establish complete domination over the *perioikoi* and then to maintain it indefinitely (*Panath.* 177–81). The picture he gives of the *perioikoi* was probably widely shared by his Greek contemporaries. As we saw earlier, he first gives a pseudo-historical account of events which, according to him, led to the status of *perioikos* coming into existence. After winning a civil war (*stasis*), the aristocrats of Sparta “reduced the *dēmos* to the status of *perioikoi*, enslaving the souls of these men as thoroughly as those of their slaves”. This expression does not mean that Isokrates is conflating the *perioikoi* with the helots. For him, while the latter were slaves in body and soul, the *perioikoi* were only slaves in their psychology, because they accepted the inferior status which the Spartans had imposed upon them. The secret of Sparta's successful dominance lay in having contrived to place strict limits on how far the *poleis* of the *perioikoi* could develop the size of their populations and the nature of their economies. This had been achieved by exiling this underclass to outlying and unproductive land, and by fragmenting them into *poleis* which were numerous and tiny. In this way the *perioikoi* had been made permanently incapable of resisting the will of Sparta.

This reconstruction of events by Isokrates is, of course, pure fiction. But the fiction is woven around historical fact. The *poleis* of the *perioikoi* were indeed situated in outlying parts of Lakedaimonian territory, and in some cases were very far from Sparta itself. It was true also that these *poleis* were many in number, and usually of no great size. But all this had not been decided by

Sparta. And it is surely untrue that the *perioikoi* lived wretched and impoverished lives. They had other resources than agriculture: mining, fishing, trade and crafts. Isokrates' account is, in short, ideologically deeply biased. On the other hand, what he says (ss. 180–1) about the methods used by the Spartans of his own day to perpetuate their domination over the *perioikoi* should be taken seriously. His two main points are: Sparta's use of the *perioikoi* as soldiers, and the power of the Spartan ephors to have *perioikoi* put to death without trial.

Among Isokrates' criticisms of Spartan treatment of the *perioikoi* is the accusation that the latter were exploited shamelessly as a military force. Was such an accusation true? We can see how far the *perioikoi*, in the military sphere, were subject to the will of Sparta from the way that decisions were taken to go to war, and how war was conducted. Xenophon in the *Hellenika* recounts fifteen episodes of wars begun by Sparta (Richer (1998) 324–34), which show clearly that only the Spartan authorities, and the Assembly in particular, deliberated and voted on the question of beginning hostilities. The Spartan ephors then gave to the perioikic *poleis* the order to mobilize, no doubt specifying how many troops to supply, and also set a time and place for the forces to assemble. The place might be within Lakedaimonian territory, close to the frontier, or at some point beyond. Before deciding to go to war, Sparta might consult its allies; as for the *perioikoi*, they played no role in the decision-making. However, although the perioikic *poleis* were thus completely subject to Sparta in questions of war and peace, they were able to conduct some interstate relations on their own account: inscriptions show that certain of them had *proxenoi* of their own for other states.

So much is certain. In the rest of this chapter we deal with more speculative matters. Were the *perioikoi* obliged to take part in *every* campaign of the Spartans? The great majority of modern historians have thought so: that the Spartans never went to war without the *perioikoi*. However, in his book on the Spartan army, Lazenby (1985) argued the opposite. In his view, until the time of Leuktra (371) Sparta avoided mobilizing the *perioikoi* for wars against other Peloponnesians. And it is true that no ancient source mentions explicitly a perioikic presence in any such campaign. Lazenby points out in particular that when Thucydides (5.64–74) gives his description of the forces present at the battle of Mantinea (418), he makes no mention of *perioikoi*. Similarly in Xenophon, there is no mention, before the battle of Leuktra, of perioikic troops on a campaign against Peloponnesians. Lazenby's theory has not found many supporters, but it must be admitted that – like other arguments from silence – it cannot be definitively disproved. A chief consideration against it, however, is the assumption on which it is based: that the Spartans would have been so suspicious of the *perioikoi* as to forego their help on campaigns against neighbouring peoples, which usually meant those against Arcadian states and Argos. The assumption that relations between Sparta and the

perioikoi were based solely on force seems not to be borne out by the facts, and cannot be relied on. Also, there are positive signs in Xenophon's work that the Spartans never went to war alone. As we shall see in a moment, he uses a consistent set of expressions to denote the Lakedaimonian army, referring, for example, to "the citizen contingent" on campaigns inside and outside the Peloponnese, before and after 371. This suggests that in his view the army of Sparta always took essentially the same form. This impression is confirmed by the fact that when describing, in the *Lakedaimonion Politeia*, how the army created by Lykourgos was organized and how it operated, not only does he twice mention the presence of a perioikic contingent, the Skiritai, but he attributes to it a precise role, that of ensuring the safety of the whole army, both when it was static (12.3) and when it was on the move (13.6). Because protection of this kind was essential for every campaign, Xenophon must have understood that the Spartan army could never have set out without some, at least, of the *perioikoi*.

How large a proportion of Spartan-led forces consisted of *perioikoi*? In the first episode where we have such information, the battle of Plataia against the Persians in 479, equality in numbers was the rule, according to our main source, Herodotus. Thereafter, the *perioikoi* disappear from our records of great battles until Leuktra, and we are obliged to rely on calculations made by modern historians. Thomas Figueira ((1986) 212) estimates thus the numbers of Spartiate and perioikic soldiers of mobilization age at the following two major battles:

Mantineia (418 BC): Spartiates – between 2086 and 2141; *perioikoi* – between 3349 and 3404 (plus 600 Skiritai);

Leuktra (371 BC): Spartiates – 938; *perioikoi* – 2150 (plus the Skiritai?).

An impressive process of change can be seen. Overall, and without counting the Skiritai, the proportion of Spartiates to *perioikoi* moves from 50:50 in 479 to 39:61 in 418 and then to 30:70 in 371. The proportion of the fighting which fell to the *perioikoi* has grown palpably larger over the years.

The organization of the Lakedaimonian army is in many ways an obscure and difficult subject. And perhaps the most obscure aspect of all is the question whether the *perioikoi* fought in separate units of their own, or whether they were brigaded together with the Spartiates. Lazenby may be the only historian in modern times to reject the possibility that some, at least, of the *perioikoi* were integrated in Spartan units ((1985) 14–18). His position is at least consistent, given his view that before 371 the *perioikoi* took no part in campaigns within the Peloponnese: it would be difficult to imagine an army which changed its fundamental structure from one campaign to another. But Lazenby's hypothesis would beg the question of how, with an ever-decreasing population of Spartan citizens to draw on, Sparta continued to be able to

mobilize an adequate army – unless she was drawing on more and more *perioikoi* to supply the deficit. Lazenby recognized the problem: his answer was, that the shortfall was made up by Sparta's population of Inferiors. But it seems highly unlikely that the Inferiors were sufficiently numerous for that. The fact that the Lakedaimonian army was maintained at a viable level, in spite of the ceaseless decline in Spartiate numbers in the classical period, is best explained by the assumption that Sparta was using the military resources of the *perioikoi*. This is why almost all specialists are now agreed that in the fourth century every unit of the Lakedaimonian army was mixed, with Spartiates and *perioikoi* fighting together, except for the Skiritai, who always fought separately.

Could *perioikoi* become commanders of Lakedaimonian forces? In the Lakedaimonian land army, there is no record that such a thing ever took place. It was apparently unthinkable that a *perioikos* should give orders to a Spartiate, which is what would have happened as soon as military units became mixed (from the mid-fifth century, perhaps) *if* any of the *perioikoi* had been allowed to command. Indeed, in the fourth century even the contingents of non-Lakedaimonian allies were commanded by Spartiates. In the whole of Greek history, the only known case of a *perioikos* entrusted with a command concerns the navy: Deiniadas was commander of a squadron in the Aegean in 412 (Thuc. 8.22.1). Now, for obvious reasons of geography, seafaring was a specialism of the *perioikoi*: this makes the uniqueness of the case of Deiniadas all the more significant.

In military matters, then, the *perioikoi* were far from being free and equal allies of the Spartans. So much is clear from the way wars were decided upon, from the way the Lakedaimonian army was mobilized, and from the structure of command. However, if we take account of the size of their respective populations, war weighed less heavily upon the *perioikoi* than it did upon the Spartiates. While the *perioikis* may be estimated as having contained over these periods at least four times as many citizens as Sparta (Ducat (2008), n. 117), in 371 it supplied only slightly more than twice as many fighting men.

23.3 The *Perioikoi* and Spartan Kings

Various evidence shows that perioikic *poleis* had close ties with the kings of Sparta. Xenophon states (*Lak. Pol.* 15.3) that Lykourgos had assigned to each of the Spartan kings “select pieces of land in many of the perioikic *poleis*, sufficient to give him a middling fortune but not to allow him to become extremely rich”. The way in which Xenophon describes the size of these landholdings shows that he is attempting to answer a criticism, no doubt

current in his time, according to which the Spartan kings were indeed too rich. The attribution to Lykourgos is clearly a politically-motivated fiction, but that Spartan kings held land in some of the perioikic cities can be taken as fact. Should this be seen as another aspect of perioikic subordination to Sparta? To judge by the present passage, Xenophon obviously thought so. These royal holdings consisted of “choice land” (*gēn exaireton*), land of the highest quality. Now, we have seen from Isokrates that such land was alleged to be, for the *perioikoi*, a rare commodity. To lose it was therefore a serious sacrifice. Xenophon suggests that this sacrifice was not made voluntarily: it has been imposed by Lykourgos as if he were all-powerful in the *perioikis*, as he was at Sparta.

Such is Xenophon’s version of history. It cannot of course be correct. In the *Iliad* we read of several cases of communities’ making similar grants of land to military leaders from elsewhere, in return for their services. In each case the community itself defines the land in question and presents it as a gift: the Lycians to Bellerophon, the Aitolians to Meleagros. Now, Spartan kings were supreme commanders in war, for the *perioikoi* as for the Spartiates, so probably it was in this capacity that they received these landholdings. Admittedly these gifts may not have been entirely spontaneous on the part of the *perioikoi*, but neither can they be seen simply as an aspect of their subjection to Sparta. The landholdings express a different mentality, and reflect a recognition by the *perioikoi* that the kings of Sparta were royalty indeed: Sparta’s kings were their kings too.

We hear also of a somewhat mysterious “royal tribute”. The only source for this is the doubtfully-Platonic dialogue the *First Alkibiades* (122d–123b), the date of which is uncertain. Its author writes:

Concerning these riches, the largest and most frequent levies are made in favour of the kings, not to mention the royal tribute (*basilikos phoros*) which the Lakedaimonians pay to the kings and which itself is far from insignificant.

These words have generally been taken as referring to a tribute supposedly paid by the perioikic *poleis* to the kings of Sparta in the classical period. It is commonly linked with a passage of Ephoros (ap. Strabo 8.5.4 = 70 F117) which states that Agis, son of Eurysthenes, imposed on the “neighbouring peoples” (*perioikoi*) at one and the same time political subjection and “the payment of tribute to Sparta”. This is then taken to refer to a forerunner of the tribute recorded of the classical period. The latter, however, is described by our single source as paid to the kings and not to the Spartan *polis*. And while it is conceivable that tribute paid originally to the kings was later paid to the *polis*, the opposite development is very hard to imagine.

Also, the idea that Agis’s tribute was a forerunner presupposes that in our passage of the *First Alkibiades* the word “Lakedaimonians” means the

perioikoi alone, something which is at odds with classical usage: in classical Greek the word “Lakedaimonians” means the whole entity formed by the Spartiates and the *perioikoi*. It seems that, concerning the very existence of the “royal tribute”, the mystery must remain.

Spartan royal funerals are a subject which evidently concerned the *perioikoi* and on which we have a detailed and very striking passage of Herodotus (6.58). “Whenever the death occurs of a king of the Lakedaimonians, the whole of Lakedaimon – the Spartiates but also the *perioikoi* in predetermined numbers – is obliged to attend the funeral”, a description of which then follows. Herodotus here emphasizes the compulsory nature of the attendance by a fixed number of “representatives” of the *perioikoi* as participants in the funeral. (For *all* the *perioikoi* to attend would have been physically impossible.) Evidently he saw this compulsion as a sign of the political subordination of the perioikic communities. We may wonder, however, whether he was right. In every society an event such as the funeral of the supreme leader is seen to require, above all, a display of wholehearted unanimity on the part of the community. The tendency on such occasions is for integration, not for exclusion or the enforcement of hierarchy. So in the present case: taking part in royal funerals was, for the *perioikoi*, not so much an obligation imposed on them as the recognition of a privilege, signalling that the deceased had been king for them as much as for the Spartiates. Or perhaps the truth is rather that in such cases obligation and privilege are two facets of the same social relationship.

Was there an aristocracy within the *perioikoi* and, if so, what were its relations with the Spartan royal families? Here our starting point is a passage of Xenophon (*Hell.* 5.3.9), which states that among those who came to accompany king Agesipolis on the campaign against Olynthos in 381/0 were members of the perioikic aristocracy: “He was escorted by many members of the elite (*kaloï kagathoi*) of the *perioikoi*, who had come as volunteers, and also by men from other states (*xenoi*) of the class known as *trophimoi*”. These men were volunteers, but their intention, implies Xenophon, was not so much to take part in the expedition as to “attend” (*akolouthēin*) the king. This episode reveals that there existed personal relations between, on the one hand, the leading families of certain perioikic *poleis* and, on the other, the two Spartan royal houses and probably also other eminent Spartiate families. That there were also present on the expedition certain *trophimoi* (citizens of other states who as children had been invited by a Spartan family to grow up in the Spartan public education) prompts us to see that this institution concerning *trophimoi* may very well have been one of the main ways in which these leading families co-operated. The children of the perioikic aristocracy were eminent candidates for invitation to become *trophimoi*, and their families were similarly well-placed to agree to such. In this way the royal or aristocratic families of Sparta could build a relation of patronage with the elite

of the *perioikoi*. In this case we should be in a very different moral climate from the simple subjection which is too often seen as the fate of *perioikoi*. Xenophon's account of this episode suggests that the reality was more complicated.

Close and direct relations existed, then, between the kings of Sparta and the perioikic cities. The reasons for such a relationship are clear. During a military campaign, whichever king Sparta had chosen to command the army was the supreme commander of the perioikic soldiers just as much as of the Spartiates present, and the more obviously so once Spartiates and *perioikoi* began to be brigaded together. Also, for the duration of the campaign the king was, for *perioikoi* and Spartiates alike, their intermediary with the gods, the person who conducted sacrifices in their name. The narratives of Thucydides and Xenophon show how this relationship was deepened by the fact of shared danger. During an expedition, for all the *perioikoi* present Sparta's king was also truly their own.

23.4 Sparta and the Internal Affairs of Perioikic Poleis

So far we have seen a situation which was normal for those Greek cities involved in an unequal alliance: the less powerful member of the relationship lost part of its sovereignty, in the sphere of war and foreign policy. But for perioikic *poleis* the subordination went wider, since it touched elements of internal affairs. Quite which, we shall now try to establish.

The idea that the *poleis* of the *perioikoi* were regularly "administered" by envoys from Sparta, named "harmosts", although it long remained orthodoxy, was rejected by MacDowell ((1986) 29; Hampl (1937) 44 had written similarly) and now has few or no supporters. Rightly. The idea was based on a single ancient passage, the comment of an anonymous scholiast (to Pindar, *Ol.* 6.154). The passage in question states: "The Lakedaimonians had twenty harmosts". The term "Lakedaimonians" was taken to mean the *perioikoi* (contrary to classical Greek usage, as we have seen), and the rest of the phrase as meaning that "twenty harmosts exercised power over the 'Lakedaimonians'", whereas its most natural sense would be "Among the Lakedaimonians twenty men were designated as harmosts". And the context, in which the scholiast's phrase occurs, confirms our doubts: the commentator was using "harmost" in its familiar sense: a Spartiate sent abroad to govern a *polis* within Sparta's empire, during the first quarter of the fourth century.

There is, then, no reason to think that there were harmosts in the perioikic *poleis*. But did Sparta perhaps place garrisons there, under the control of a *phrourarchos*? That would in practice have amounted to the same thing.

Scholars have claimed to identify the following cases: Mothone in 431 (Thuc. 2.25.2), Kythera in 424 (Thuc. 4.53.2), Thyrea in 424 (Thuc. 4.56.2), Aulon c.399 (Xen. *Hell.* 3.3.8), Oios and Leuktron in 370 (*Hell.* 6.5.24), Asine-in-Laconia c.369 (*Hell.* 7.1.25). Consideration of these cases suggests two things, one strategic and one political. The strategy adopted in wartime by the Spartiates, for defending Lakedaimonian territory, was not one of “garrisons” in the modern sense, but instead involved “surveillance forces” (*phrourai*) distributed over a very wide area and moving about constantly to meet any and every enemy incursion. As for Sparta’s political attitude towards the perioikic cities in general, it did not involve dependence on the kind of force which a harmost or garrison would have represented. This moderation was not motivated by respect for the rights of *perioikoi*; rather, such use of military force would have been far too expensive in manpower, at a time when Sparta was increasingly short of fighting men. Relations between Sparta and the perioikic *poleis* were not based simply on superior force; a policy of military constraint was not needed.

If such was the rule, there were – as to most rules – certain exceptions. In the Lakedaimonian system, we know of one: Kythera. Recounting the invasion of the island by Athens in 424, Thucydides (4.53.2) writes:

Kythera is an island close to Laconia, south of Cape Malea. Its inhabitants are Lakedaimonians, of the class known as *perioikoi*. Every year an official sent from Sparta, the “judge for Kythera”, used to come to the island. The Spartans also used to send there a company of hoplites, whose membership was rotated constantly, and they guarded the place with the utmost care.

The historian goes on, in the following section, to set out the reason for this watchfulness: the strategic position of the island. Under Spartan control, Kythera served as a way-station for trade with Cyrenaica, and was a base for the fight against piracy. Under enemy control, it would be a deadly threat to Laconia (cf. Herod. 7.235). Thucydides evidently understood that the reason why the Spartans customarily had a “judge for Kythera” was to keep a close eye on what happened within the Kytheran community. To this end, he will have had – as his title suggests – sovereign power over all important trials, and especially the political ones. We see, then, that where the affairs of a perioikic *polis* had vital importance for the Spartans, they were quite ready to intervene in them openly, and even to create a government institution to do so.

In the passage of the *Panathenaicus* (177–81), of which the pseudo-historical elements were discussed above, Isokrates criticizes the Spartans’ treatment of the *perioikoi* for two main things: for the way in which they exploited the *perioikoi* as soldiers (180) and – in his eyes “the most serious of their injustices” – for the fact that “the ephors have complete discretion to have any of them whom they wish put to death without trial” (181). This latter claim must be taken very seriously as historical evidence. It is strongly supported by

Xenophon's reference to the alleged mission to perioikic Aulon, which is at the heart of his account of how the conspiracy of Kinadon was repressed by Sparta (*Hell.* 3.3.8–9). Although this supposed mission was merely a fiction, designed to remove Kinadon from his accomplices, the fiction had to be plausible. It thus casts light on Isokrates' claim, and helps to explain it. Why, we should ask, did the ephors need and receive the power to judge the *perioikoi* and to condemn them to death?

Xenophon's account shows that, in order to condemn particular *perioikoi*, the ephors had the power to have them arrested in their own communities by members of the only standing armed force which Sparta possessed, the corps of *hippeis*. The arrested suspects were then taken to the ephors; it is at this stage that Xenophon's account fits fairly well with Isokrates' words. The latter then states that the *perioikoi* were put to death "without a trial". These words must not be taken to mean that the unfortunate suspects were executed promptly on their arrival at Sparta, without any further form of examination. Inevitably they were questioned, above all to obtain information on the affair in which they were involved, but also to determine whether they were guilty of impairing the security of Sparta. It was in Sparta's own interest to condemn to death as few innocent *perioikoi* as possible. Suspect *perioikoi* must therefore have undergone some sort of trial, but only before the ephors and not before a court as was normally the case for free men. To say that they were executed "without trial" is therefore an oversimplification, hardly surprising as coming from Isokrates.

As for the affair at Aulon, we shall never know what – if anything – had happened there. But the case does reveal that the ephors received information on the internal affairs of perioikic *poleis*. Information implies informers. The perioikic system evidently depended on the Spartan authorities' having a network of informers, recruited among the local population, to keep them permanently abreast of events. It was this power of the ephors – to intervene in the *perioikis* whenever they thought that Sparta's security required it, to arrest and take to Sparta persons considered dangerous, to try them and, in appropriate cases, to condemn them to death – which for Isokrates symbolized the subjection of the *perioikoi*. And so it does for ourselves. But, in fairness, we should add that the Greek world in general produced, where there were alliances between unequals, many similar cases of brutal intervention by the stronger partner in the internal affairs of the weaker.

23.5 The Role of the *Perioikoi* in Lakedaimon as a Whole

We began with the formula "Sparta + *perioikis* = Lakedaimon". To understand

the position of the *perioikoi*, we need to ask what exactly Lakedaimon was. Recent historians are fully agreed on their answer: Lakedaimon was a state. But how far can we understand this state theoretically? As an initial summary, we might say that the Lakedaimonian state had, as its body of citizens, Spartiates and *perioikoi*. It had a political centre, also called Lakedaimon, which geographically-speaking was identical with – Sparta. It had a political structure, a *politeia*, determining who counted as citizens and how the state was governed. And its territory was the sum of the land belonging to Sparta and to the various perioikic *poleis*.

How to characterize this Lakedaimonian state? On first principles, we might suppose that historians of today would have chosen one or other of two possibilities: either Lakedaimon was a *polis*, a city-state, or it was a state of some other kind: a federal state, perhaps, or an *ethnos*. But recent scholarly literature reveals that no such choice has been made. It is not a case of scholars' having clear but divergent opinions: instead, for Lakedaimon the same writers use indiscriminately the terms *polis* and "state", whereas in other cases they would carefully distinguish between the two terms.

As there was supposedly a single Lakedaimonian state, there is correspondingly supposed to have been a single Lakedaimonian population, comprising the Spartiates and the *perioikoi*. This population, this society, was eminently hierarchical. At its pinnacle were the Spartiates, who alone possessed full political rights, alone meeting in an Assembly which took decisions affecting the whole of Lakedaimon, and alone having the right to become officials. Thus, in Lakedaimon the *perioikoi* are supposed to have formed an inferior social category. The classic definition is that given by the German scholar F. Hampl ((1937) 7): "Die Periöken waren ... als *Lakedaimonioi* eine Klasse minderen Rechtes innerhalb der Gesamtheit der Angehörigen des lakedämonischen Staates" ("the *perioikoi* were ..., as Lakedaimonians, a second-class category within the membership of the Lakedaimonian state"). Cartledge ((1987) 16) goes further, stating that the condition of the *perioikoi* fell some way short of full civic rights: "The Perioikoi were personally free, unlike the Helots But vis-a-vis Sparta they had no public rights whatsoever ..., and probably for most of them their private rights of landholding and marriage and civil contracts were conditioned upon the goodwill of the suzerain." This comes close to suggesting that the *perioikoi* resembled the subjected inhabitants of a conquered territory, whose masters allowed them only a limited form of "municipal" independence. Such is the image of Lakedaimon and of the status of the *perioikoi*, as generally accepted by modern scholars. We may however criticize it as follows.

To begin with the idea of society: the notion of a single, overall Lakedaimonian society is a strange one. Once we admit that the *perioikoi* lived in city-states, we are admitting also that the society in which every

individual citizen, Spartiate or *perioikos*, within this Lakedaimonian entity, lived was – that of his own city-state. So, what evidence is there for this theory of a single, overall Lakedaimonian society? The evidence in question has been conveniently collected by Shipley ((1997) 198). It consists of passages from Xenophon's *Hellenika*, which all occur – with a single exception – in military contexts, and which refer not to social categories but to bodies of soldiers. The author's purpose in these references is solely to describe the composition of the Lakedaimonian army on a particular campaign; where the *perioikoi* are mentioned it is purely as military contingents. The sole exception is the list which Kinadon is described as giving, of his potential allies (3.3.6). It mentions the *perioikoi*, but only as such potential supporters, not as inferior members of a Lakedaimonian *polis*; the text mentions no such *polis*.

The idea of a single, overall Lakedaimonian *polis* seems to the present writer thoroughly problematic. To take first its citizen body: to claim that there existed a *polis* of Lakedaimon involves conceding that both the Spartiates and the *perioikoi* were citizens of two *poleis* at once. This is seriously problematic, because we know of no other Greek society where such a thing applied. The obvious recourse would be to envisage the Lakedaimonian state as being a state of a different kind from a *polis*: a federal state, for example. But scholars have, quite reasonably (as we shall see), unanimously rejected this possibility.

Our sources contain no trace of any institutions belonging strictly to Lakedaimon. One might of course evade this difficulty, by saying that the institutions of Sparta did duty as such: that the Spartan assembly was the assembly of Lakedaimon; that the *gerousia* was the council of Lakedaimon, and that the ephors were the chief magistrates of Lakedaimon. That in fact is what scholars do claim; but it is a claim for which there is no proof. Let us admit that there was indeed such a thing as Lakedaimonian territory, with a precise frontier. But if one were to argue that this was the territory of a *state*, from the fact that it comprised the territory of Sparta, on the one hand, and the territories of many perioikic *poleis* on the other, one would be faced with the conclusion that every part of this territory was under dual ownership: that it belonged, at the same time, both to Lakedaimon and to another *polis*, in some cases to Sparta and in other cases to one or other of the perioikic *poleis*. We have no known case anywhere in Greece of such co-ownership of land.

The “*polis* of Lakedaimon” thus has, it seems, no citizens of its own, no institutions, no territory. It is truly a ghost *polis*. Why, then, given these various problems, has the theory of a Lakedaimonian state been generally accepted, right up to the present? A brief review of scholarship shows that this theory has been remarkably consistent in its appeal. It has persisted from German scholarship of the 1920s and 1930s (Kahrstedt (1922), Wilcken (1924), Ehrenberg (1924), Busolt and Swoboda (1926), Hampl (1937)), until

the international scholarship of today. This is all the more surprising in that, since 1970, all the other main aspects of Spartan society as traditionally conceived have been called into question. As we have seen, the status of perioikic communities has itself been reconsidered. In the years when the theory of the Lakedaimonian state was worked out, perioikic communities were seen as entirely subject to Sparta politically, with at most a qualified local independence. Nowadays, on the other hand, with more and more published source-material to work from, most specialists regard these communities as *poleis*, effectively contradicting the idea of a Lakedaimonian state. But the necessary adjustment of theory has not been made. This is not yet the point to reject the old orthodoxy, but it is high time to see what evidence that orthodoxy drew on.

Essentially, the orthodoxy was based on three expressions used in certain texts of the classical period: “the *polis* of the Lakedaimonians”, “king of the Lakedaimonians” and phrases such as “the citizen army”. Of these three expressions the clearest are the first two, since they both contain the phrase “the Lakedaimonians”. Before we examine their meaning, we should dwell for a moment on something which is in one sense well known, but seldom fully understood: a blurring in Greek authors of Sparta and Lakedaimon, and correspondingly of Spartiates and Lakedaimonians. Now there is no real confusion in the minds of these authors: when it matters to them, they make the distinction perfectly well. But even Thucydides, famed for his precision, can blur the point on occasion: at 1.10.2 he calls the town of Sparta, with its physical monuments, “the *polis* of the Lakedaimonians”. Likewise Xenophon, deemed so knowledgeable about Sparta, refers at *Hell.* 3.2 to the “Lakedaimonians” (s.21) but shortly afterwards (s.23) writes of the same people as “the ephors and the Assembly”, which shows that he is in both passages referring only to the Spartiates. And Herodotus in several passages alternates between the terms “Spartiates” and “Lakedaimonians” without any distinction of meaning: thus, 1.65; 1.152-3; 6.52 and the entire narrative of the battle of Thermopylai. When a Greek author uses the name “Lakedaimonians”, not only do we have no way of telling – except sometimes from context – whether he means Lakedaimonians or Spartiates; for the author himself, in most cases, it amounted to the same thing.

To come now to the term “*polis* of the Lakedaimonians”: it is this expression which has given rise to the theory that there existed a “city-state of Lakedaimon”. It has been taken to show two things for certain: that a Lakedaimonian state existed, and that it took the form of a *city*-state. Eleven occurrences of the term have been found (Bölte (1929) 1282). The instance at Thuc. 1.10.2 is unique, in referring to Sparta as a *town*. The other ten instances fall into two categories. In the first category (Thuc. 7.56.4; Xen. *Hell.* 2.1.14; Isocrates *Panath.* 61 and *Philip* 40; Aristotle *Pol.* 1273a, 1–2), the author is referring to Sparta, not only as a state but as a major power in the

Greek world. In the second category (Thuc. 8.2.3 and 5.3; Xen. *Hell.* 3.5.6; 5.4.23; 8.4.21) the reference is to the Spartan “authorities”, the members of the government who are in possession of all information about current developments and have the power to take decisions as a matter of urgency. It is entirely clear that never in the classical period do we find the expression “*polis* of the Lakedaimonians” referring to any “*polis* of Lakedaimon” apart from Sparta. Nowhere does the expression even hint at such a thing. Only Sparta is meant: what we have is just a further case of the Greek capacity to refer to Sparta as “Lakedaimon” and to the Spartiates as “Lakedaimonians”.

Then we have the term “king of the Lakedaimonians”. The occurrences of this expression in Xenophon (twice), Androtion (once) and the doubtfully-Platonic *Alkibiades* (once) are not decisive. All the other cases of its use are in Herodotus and Thucydides, but with an important difference between the two authors. In Herodotus, the king is usually (in twenty-one cases = 75 per cent) mentioned in connection with Sparta or the Spartiates; only in seven cases (=25 per cent) is he linked instead with Lakedaimon or the Lakedaimonians. This proportion, 75:25, is the same as we find overall in this author’s use of the respective terms “Sparta” and “Lakedaimon”. Thucydides, on the other hand, uses invariably the term “king of the Lakedaimonians”. This consistency is connected with the fact that all his usages (except one, where he is referring to the kings of Sparta in general) occur in the same connection: the occasions, regular and frequent in his narrative, on which the Lakedaimonian army sets out on campaign. In other words, we are dealing with a set formula, all the more understandable in that the king was in effect commander of the Lakedaimonian army. There is nothing here to suggest that Thucydides believed in the existence of a “*polis* of Lakedaimon”.

The last of the three expressions used to support the idea of a “*polis* of Lakedaimon” is *politikon strateuma*. Unlike the other two phrases just considered, this one does not involve the term “Lakedaimonians”; the above-mentioned “confusion” is therefore not at work. Scholars have argued from eight occurrences, all of them in Xenophon’s *Hellenika* (Hampl (1937) 26 n. 2; Lotze (1993/4) 39–40; Mertens (2002) 288 and n. 19). These cases do not, in fact, involve a single expression but a group of related expressions, the most significant of which is *to politikon strateuma* (“the citizen army”), which is found twice. The shorter phrase *to politikon* (“the citizen [army]”) also occurs twice. There is one occurrence of *ta politika* (“the citizen [soldiers]”), two of *hoi politai* (“the citizens”), and one of *to oikothē strateuma* (“the army from home”). What Xenophon is referring to, in all these cases, is simply the Lakedaimonian army – Spartiates and *perioikoi* together (cf. 6.5.21; 7.4.20, 27) – though in a particular context. The context always involves a contrast with another group of soldiers, usually Sparta’s allies but on one occasion mercenaries. The circumstances are, either departure for a campaign (three cases), or the last phase of a campaign, when the mercenaries

and the allies have been sent away and the king is leading back the Lakedaimonian contingent to their homes (five cases).

An expression based on the idea of citizenship could, then, be applied to the *perioikoi* as well as to the Spartiates. But of what state can these *perioikoi* and Spartiates all be citizens, if not of Lakedaimon? The logic seems inescapable. We should note, however, that these expressions do not refer to the body of citizens in general but only to the army, in circumstances where – the allies and the mercenaries being absent – it was reduced to its citizen component. Expressions of this kind are not peculiar to Xenophon or to Sparta; they are found – *politikon strateuma* (“citizen army”), *politikai dynameis* (“citizen forces”) – especially in Demosthenes and Aischines. In the fourth century such references were common; they were to continue into Hellenistic times (as in Polybios and Diodorus Siculus). There was nothing peculiarly Lakedaimonian about their context; they reflect a world in which mercenary soldiers were increasingly common and a nostalgia for an age when Greek armies were made up exclusively of citizens. When Xenophon uses such expressions about Sparta, and calls *perioikoi* “citizens”, he is reflecting not legal technicalities but social status. He is contrasting citizen soldiers, from the Lakedaimonian territory as a whole, with allies and mercenaries who were outsiders.

To summarize: the theory of the “Lakedaimonian state” or the “*polis* of Lakedaimon” is deeply problematic. The ancient passages on which it was based, in the early twentieth century, can be explained much more easily as a result either of blurring of Spartiates and Lakedaimonians, or of a desire to distinguish between an army of local citizens and one of outsiders. But a question remains: if Lakedaimon was not a city-state, what was it, and what was the status of the *perioikoi* within it? A good starting point is a comment made by J.A.O. Larsen (1970) on the character of the Lakedaimonian entity: “Thus the entire complex resembled a federal state, with the federal government delegated to the Spartiates, though the emphasis on military service caused it to resemble an alliance.” While we may not be able to say what Lakedaimon was, we can try to say what, in our eyes, it was *like*. It was like a city-state, in that it had the power to declare war, make a peace treaty and form an alliance. However, it resembles even more closely a federal state, something which also possessed those various powers. It brought together several city-states, *poleis*, one of which, far more powerful than the rest, deprived the others of an important element of their sovereignty. It had a territory which was the sum of the territories of the city-states which belonged to it, and it also possessed a combined army. But Lakedaimon was *not* a federal state. No source from the classical period uses of Lakedaimon the distinctive language of federalism, terms such as *ethnos* or *koinon*. There is no trace whatsoever of federal institutions for Lakedaimon, not even in the religious sphere. As Larsen observed, it also in a way resembles an alliance;

we might be tempted to view Lakedaimon as the result of an unequal military alliance which had gone through a long period of evolution with an army increasingly integrated. But Lakedaimon was *not* an alliance, and the *perioikoi* are never, in relation to Sparta, described by the definitive term for allies, *symmachoi*.

From this survey of plausible but ultimately unacceptable theories we conclude that the collectivity known as *hoi Lakedaimonioi* (“the Lakedaimonians”) formed a community but not a state. What held it together was the feeling of its members that they formed an ethnic and cultural unity (rather as Hampl long ago suggested (1937) 21–30). This unity involved their dialect of Greek, their alphabet, their religious cults and festivals, and above all the possession of a territory which must have been felt all the more as a shared possession in that it was defended by a shared army.

It may be said with truth that the Lakedaimonian collectivity served the common interest of its members. For Sparta, the *perioikis* formed a circle of “first friends” always available for military mobilization, forming part of the foundation of the city’s pre-eminent power. As for the *perioikoi*, they must have taken pride in fighting alongside the men reputed as the best warriors in Greece. But in addition having Sparta on, and at, their side was the best possible guarantee of physical security in a Greek world where turbulence and threats of invasion were the norm. This is the answer to the question, Why was the “perioikic system” so durable? During the great revolt of the Messenian helots c.464, Thucydides (1.101.2) records only two perioikic cities as joining the insurrection: one, Thouria, was important; the other, Aithaia, was much less so. For other known defections we have to wait until the Theban invasion of 369, when Sparta had its back to the wall and when the *perioikoi* had little choice.

We have rejected the traditional view, that the *perioikoi* were no more than second-class citizens within a Lakedaimonian state. There was no such state. And although the *poleis* of which they were citizens had lost to Sparta a significant part of their sovereignty, the *perioikoi* remained full citizens of their communities, enjoying the many privileges which citizenship involved.

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FURTHER READING

The study of this subject by Hampl in German still repays careful reading, in spite of its date (1937). He gives a thorough general discussion, collects the source material and makes numerous eminently lucid observations.

Among more recent studies, the most thorough is Shipley (1997). Its main element (pp. 223–71) is the list it gives of all centres of population in perioikic territory, at all periods: *poleis* and humble *kōmai* alike. The relevant source material is given for each place separately. An updated version by the same author can be found in the *Inventory* edited by Hansen and Nielsen (Shipley (2004)).

Shipley’s catalogue is preceded by an Introduction (Shipley (1997) 192–213) dealing with, *inter alia*, the political status of perioikic communities. This latter subject was subsequently treated more systematically by Hansen (2004), who shows – in response to the articles of Eremin (2002) and Mertens (2002) – that the perioikic communities were not subdivisions either of Sparta (as Eremin) or of the “*polis* of Lakedaimon” (as Mertens), but were *poleis* in their own right.

On the political status of the *perioikoi* and their relations with the Spartiates, the traditional point of view – that there was a single Lakedaimonian state, with the *perioikoi* as second-class citizens within it – has been defended by Lotze (1993/4), who nevertheless shows signs of conceiving this Lakedaimonian state as a sort of federation, and by Hall (2000). For the latter, Lakedaimon combined a horizontal structure, made up of numerous neighbouring *poleis*, with a state structure which was vertical: the Spartiates being the ruling class and the *perioikoi* being their social inferiors. Thus the picture of the *perioikoi* which I have given in the present chapter differs from that found in previous literature. For a fuller version, Ducat (2008) may be consulted.

CHAPTER 24

Roads and Quarries in Laconia

Jacqueline Christien

(Translated by Christopher Annandale and Anton Powell)

24.1 Introduction

Students of Sparta have traditionally concentrated on its political, military and cultural qualities. Far less has been written on the material structures which made possible the peculiar achievements of this the largest, and in several ways the most important, of the Greek states. With, at its height, 8,800 square kilometres of land, Sparta was not so much a city, more a category of state which originated from the Dark Ages and perhaps from the Mycenaean world. Its system, which managed to survive the development of civic institutions, allowed Laconia to remain – by Greek standards – a state of extensive territory until the arrival of the Romans. The latter, after the end of the Second Macedonian war (197 BC), understood that they had to split up this large Greek state which had dared to resist them. The present chapter relies largely on investigations conducted on the ground by the writer and by a small number of other modern specialists.

24.2 Roads in Laconia

24.2.1 Questions of method: Sparta's roads: an area of expanding interest

Work on Greek roads had already been undertaken on a broad scale by W.K. Pritchett (1980, 1982). But for the history of particular localities a different level of precision was necessary. The first step was a survey of all the fortifications, known or discoverable, across Laconian territory. Starting in 1978, initial results were published in Laconia itself (Christien (1983)). When translated into the form of a map (see [Map 24.1](#)), a road network appeared. This was, on reflection, an understandable phenomenon given the size and the cultural uniformity of the territory controlled by Sparta; a high degree of centralized control might even have been predicted.



Map 24.1 Roads in Laconia.

A substantial article in Pritchett's *Studies in Greek Topography* ((1980) Part III: 143–96) underlined the importance of the problem and collected the evidence of previous travellers and historians. In Part IV of his work Pritchett ((1982) 1–63) supplied information about the roads which ran through the northern valleys of Laconia. In addition, the present writer's own work, beginning with the study of sites on the east coast of the Laconian state, rapidly brought to attention a large number of roads in Paros.¹ It seems that all the east coast ports were linked to Sparta from the middle of the sixth century BC onwards (Christien (1992) 160–3). Further, I believe that my own work has identified, on the ground in Laconia, traces of the routes by which Thebans and allies invaded in 369 BC (Christien (1988)).

24.2.2 The first question: chronology

The traces of roads were definitely ancient. In several places it was clear that they pre-dated other kinds of roads. For example, for the descent to Sellasia, north of Sparta ([Figure 24.1](#)), the modern paved road is superimposed on the furrows of ancient traces and even incorporates elements of the latter. In Thyreatis, at the foot of Parnon on the table-land (to the east of Kastro tis Orias), the Turkish paving stones of the road have been displaced and the wheel grooves ('rodiès', in today's local Greek speech) appear beneath. On the road between Geraki (ancient Geronthrai) and Mari (ancient Marios), where a more recent road has been superimposed on the ancient traces, we can see that the latter have been carved up to allow the soil to be flattened. Is it possible to refine these vague indications?

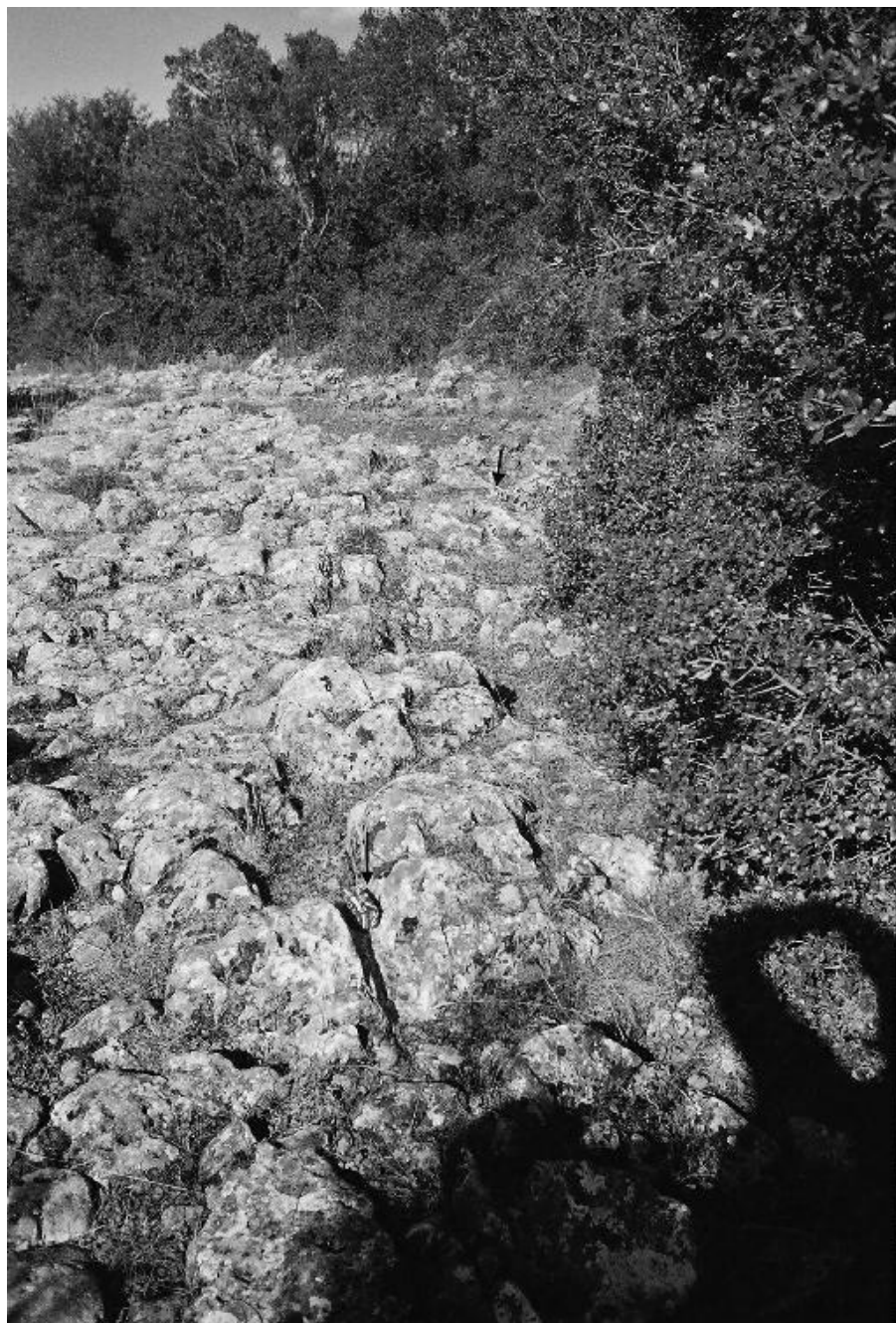


Figure 24.1 Road from Sparta to the north, descent to Sellasia. Ancient grooves incorporated in later, Turkish, cobbled road

(photo: author).

24.2.3 Can these roads be dated to the Greek era?

Several ancient texts mention practicable roads. For instance, Herodotus (8.124) tells us that Themistokles, when visiting Sparta after the Persian Wars, was presented with a ceremonial chariot and escorted to the frontier. Xenophon (*Lak.Pol.*11.2) shows that the Spartan army loaded its baggage on wagons or on load-bearing animals, depending on its destination. He also writes that Kinadon in the early fourth century was ordered by Sparta to search for suspects and to ask for wagons to avoid having to bring those arrested back on foot from Aulon in north-western Messenia (*Hell.* 3.3.9). Again, Herodotus (6.57.3) attributes responsibility for road maintenance to the Spartan kings. It therefore appears that Spartan roads date back at least to the early fifth century. Thucydides (1.13.5) states generally that before the development of the Athenian navy people travelled more often on land than by sea.

24.2.4 The second question: are surviving traces really due to wheels?

Laconia presents a complex and interesting case. As it had long coasts, there were also coastal roads. Variations in sea level over the years have swallowed up some of these roads, but parts of them come to the surface from time to time and allow us to see their original state.

The reply to our question above, ‘are surviving traces really due to wheels? (and, if so, why did chariots of later periods not leave the same traces?)’, after study of numerous existing traces, was more surprising: our Laconian roads were dug intentionally. In the region of Cape Malea, subsidence has resulted in the south eastern corner of the Peloponnese being submerged under the sea. Thus, in Antiquity, Elaphonissos was a promontory, whereas it is now separated from the mainland by several metres of water. In the Mycenaean era there was a town at the head of the gulf. In classical Antiquity a road crossed what is now a branch of the sea and its remains can be found in several places on the west side of the island. When we examine these traces, there can be no doubt. (Figure 24.2.) The ‘wheel traces’ were in fact grooves for wheels dug by human hand for several kilometres. The scattered traces now visible were not near urban sites but far away in the countryside in places which seem sometimes not to have been frequented by much traffic. In addition, there were clearly crossing-places. In other words there was a road network, created by specialists.



Figure 24.2 Elaphonissos, ancient road on the west coast of the (modern) island. Much of the ancient road nearby now lies under the sea

(photo: author).

24.2.5 A third question: how were these roads adapted to the terrain of the Spartan state?

In general, when modern authors examine the question of ancient roads, they privilege roads on plains, travel on mountains being – now (as then) – dangerous. However, Laconia is a largely mountainous state. Sparta is surrounded by mountains. The Taygetos Mountains, rising to an altitude of 2,400 metres, are very close to the city, to the west, separating it from Messenia. Mount Parnon forms a large mass to the east of Sparta, and to the north reaches an altitude of more than 2,000 metres. Skiritis, situated between the two ranges, to the north of Sparta, is also hilly, with only a single natural, easy access, the Eurotas valley. Even access to the sea is blocked by a range of hills which forces the river Eurotas to make a detour and go through a gorge impassable for human beings.

24.2.6 Can we understand the reason for digging grooved roads?

To go from Sparta to Messenia it appears that men had to climb, in Antiquity, to an altitude of 1,700 metres; to reach Thyreatis they had to cross passes at least 1,200 metres high even though the foot of the relevant mountains was at sea-level. These passes were in many cases ravines. The sides of the ravines, often used to give a gentle ascent to the head of the pass, provided an obvious route which, however, might be extremely dangerous. Following the traces of wheel grooves was the best way to stop chariots from toppling into the ravine.

24.2.7 Progress of research

The above conclusion was first communicated in 1985, and published in 1989.^{2,3} However, while a historian such as the present writer may aim to understand and explain the communication systems of the Spartan state, the contribution of archaeologists was also essential.

The existence of a road network had occurred to B. Phaklaris, a young researcher working on the ruins of Kynouria. In his thesis ((1990) 263–75) he noted the various traces he had seen and, although they were not the initial subject of his research, he was struck by their abundance.⁴

A colleague of Phaklaris, G. Pikoulas, who was working in Megalopolis north of Laconia, was also interested in roads; his own thesis contained a very interesting chapter ((1988) 198–217) going well beyond what Pritchett had noticed concerning the north of the Spartan state. Pikoulas subsequently undertook an in-depth study of these roads in the north of the Peloponnese and in Arcadia. This gave rise to a work in Greek (Pikoulas (1995)), later published in English (1999). Recently, the same author has published an important survey of Laconian roads (2012). I am delighted to see that he is in broad agreement with my own proposals, which he has supported with solid documentation and the enhanced precision afforded by modern methods.⁵ This work of Pikoulas can now be used as an authoritative guide even if, inevitably, at some points there may be room for refinement.

Given these studies we can reasonably assume that Laconia was criss-crossed by chariot routes linking Sparta to the coast across the mountains. (Indeed, something similar may be true of mainland Greece in general and also of Sicily, as we shall see later.) The Laconian network is dense and also links most of the perioikic cities to each other. These are good roads; in terms of materials they were probably not very expensive to carve out and to maintain. For the necessary skilled labour, there were – we assume – helots. These roads were not very practical from our modern point of view which is used to the concept of Roman roads. If two wagons met coming from different directions, crossing-places no doubt existed to allow them to continue. But two convoys coming from different directions would have had problems. We might speculate that the system functioned as a circuit which would partly

explain the density of the network. In that case, for convoys there would have existed a one-way system.

This road system seems to have lasted through the whole of Antiquity, until the arrival of the Slavs (seventh century AD) and even later. It often acted as a guide to later networks and long stretches remained in place until the arrival of modern vehicles. It is impossible to know the date at which this network was set up, but it is clear that Sparta was at its centre and it therefore probably dates to the high point of Spartan dominance. It can be explained by the need to dominate Messenia and also explains the conquest of the Kynouria (sixth century?). It was a network well adapted to the mountainous terrain because it allowed ravines to be climbed without the risk of chariots' overturning. It enabled heavy convoys to circulate in regions where we might not imagine such to have been possible.

24.3 The Laconian Network

Overall, the present writer is in agreement with Pikoulas' results. For the moment, his book (of 2012) is only published in Greek. What follows are the main elements of his survey, with some observations by the present writer added in *italics*.⁶

24.3.1 *Roads radiating from Sparta*

To the north, there were two main roads joined by secondary roads, one passing by Pellana with a communications hub near the river Eurotas at the foot of Mt. Chelmos, near Belmina, and the second by Sellasia with a communications hub at the plain of Karyai (which Pikoulas rightly situates at Analipsis; cf. Loring (1895) 56–7). It appears that there was also a road which crossed Skiritis. Concerning the second main road above mentioned, Pikoulas believes that it converged with its associated lesser roads towards the north east beyond Sellasia on the way to Karyai. The present writer believes in the hypothesis of a road through Oinous (and the Bassaras basin) and towards the source of the Tanos via the summit and the head of the ravine of Vamvakou, where one can see the remains of a small sanctuary. A branch left this road going towards the south of Thyreatis and the Brasiotis valley. One or two roads led from the main road, further to the north through Skotitas (modern Arachova, now Karyai), to the summit of Zugos, at an altitude of 1,200 metres, and then descended to the river Tanos. It was the road used by Pausanias the Periegete in the 2nd century AD coming from Argos.

To the west: Pikoulas and the present writer agree that a road led from beyond Mistra, and climbed the shoulder of Taygetos. Lacking further information, Pikoulas has this road descend only towards Kalamai and Pharai. This in effect concurs with my own hypothesis that the routes spread out after the ‘diodos’, (‘the passage’: *IG V* 1.1431. 1. 26), with a road at the summit of which we rediscover the traces above Pellana and routes fanning southwards towards the river Choerios, towards the sites of Alagonia, Gerenia and Kardamyle, and to the north in the direction of Argytis, and the right bank of the river Nedon (Christien (1989a) 30–3). Given the traces identifiable at altitudes of more than 1,600 metres on the Taygetos Range, Pikoulas believes in a road providing access to Limnai and, via the Poliani basin, to the plain of Stenyklaros in Messenia. This road has also left traces on the ground to the north of Poliani. It appears particularly mountainous. One wonders why it appears to have been so important given that it was possible to go towards the low plain of Messenia and then to go north without difficulties of terrain. But in fact the plain of Messenia, to the north of Thouria, was covered by the Aris marshes and was doubtless impracticable for wagons, thus explaining the mountainous route through Limnatis (and further north through Ampheia).

A second road crossed Mount Taygetos by its southern shoulder, leading to Kardamyle – and a third road, in my opinion (and according to information received from the area of Goranoi), led towards the Milia ravine and Thalamai. Pikoulas mentions the second road and the beginning of the third.

This confirmation that roads crossed the Taygetos Range is important. It contradicts the traditional assumption of historians that the Laconians had to go round the Taygetos Range to reach their subject territory of Messenia. It is true that these mountain roads must have been difficult to use in winter, because there is snow here above an altitude of 1,000 metres from November onwards. But the mountain roads allow us to understand why feasts and military campaigns took place in summer (under Sparta’s famous pitiless sun). Travelling over the mountains may perhaps have stopped in winter.

To the east: there was also a group of mountains, though less high (apart from in the north). We have observed on the ground that the north-east road reached Thyreatis. A point which has struck researchers is that all the ports of the east coast are linked to Sparta either directly (as Thyreatis by the road to Mount Barboesthes) or indirectly (as from Geronthrai).

A road led from the south of Sparta, crossing the Eurotas near Skoura by bridge or ford; there is today a place where the river can be crossed without a bridge, but only when water is low. This road led to ancient Geronthrai (modern Geraki), which appears to have been an important communication hub. Roads from Geronthrai led:

- north and east to reach Glympeis (and no doubt Prasiai beyond);
- also to Polichne and to Prasiai via Marios; and to Kyphanta;

- to the south and the plain of Helos and then to Gytheion in the west;
- to Akriai in the east;
- and, importantly, to the south-east towards the plain of Lefkai, Epidaurós Limera and Cape Malea.

The extraordinary importance of Geronthrai as a communications hub for Laconia implies that it had a particular administrative importance as well. This is confirmed by the abundance of local epigraphy. It seems eminently likely that Sparta permanently controlled, or had residents at, this place. It was doubtless one of the places where there was a harmost. This demonstrates once again the cruel deficiencies of our sources with respect to Spartan internal realities. The network of routes between the plain of Helos and the Argolid Gulf leads us to surmise that, when the roads were being built, Cape Malea was a dangerous spot, whether from storms or pirates, and was to be avoided.

To the south: there was a main road from Sparta towards Krokeai and Gytheion. Few traces remain, since this was always an inhabited zone involving many shifts in population and consequently much destruction of evidence. This road fanned out to the south of Amyklai. A second route crossed the Eurotas further south and went directly towards the Helos plain. It seems to the present writer, in the light of the route taken by Pausanias in the Roman period, that after Gytheion it also branched off towards Las then towards Pyrrhikos and Teuthrone (Kotronas). And doubtless a branch led up the depression towards the west, allowing access to the region of the quarries of Pyrgos Dirou.

24.4 Laconian Roads: Conclusions

Visible traces of ancient roads diminish from day to day. Destruction is caused by modern vehicles, and by countless roads and paths built for a population which is increasing and now motorized. Nevertheless, the survey established by Pikoulas allows us to arrive at a completely new idea of communications in ancient Greece. We note the respectful care with which the subject is broached in a recent synthesis on the Greek economy (Bresson (2007) 88–91); practically all the sites of cities seem to have been linked by roads usable by wagons. The Laconian political and social system, with its numerous, hard-working and largely unfree labour force, favoured the creation of a road network. Even helots needed to travel long distances, as for service on campaigns, whether as auxiliaries or under arms (the battle of Plataia is a famous example, but see also Thucydides (5.57.1 and 5.64.1)). Their material produce also needed to be transported, not least to Sparta. It is therefore understandable that Spartan kings, as commanders of the army and

as potent officials in peacetime, are also recorded as responsible for roads.

In addition to population centres, quarries too require roads. Several of the quarries in Spartan territory, to be described below, have roads in their vicinity. This is the case, for example, with roads that Pikoulas found in the Mani. (There are two others: the road to the rosso antico quarry that was destroyed by Italian workings in the early twentieth century, and the road descending from the summit of Tainaron, whose traces can be seen on the west side of the port of Kisternes.) The roads from the port to the north of Elaphonissos ([Figure 24.3](#)) illustrate strikingly the traces of human labour and their importance for the quarries.



Figure 24.3 Grooves of ancient roads at harbour serving quarries near Elaphonissos (modern Vinglapha)

(photo: author).

However the roads of Laconia are only part of a much larger question: that of Greek roads in general. We now have clear evidence for the Peloponnese (cf. Tausend (1998)), but occasional indications demonstrate that road-systems existed much further afield.

24.5 Roads in Greece and Elsewhere

The gauge of roads measured in Laconia is of 1.4 metres, that is four Spartan feet, which would make this network appear to be a Laconian initiative. Generally, in the Peloponnese the gauge is in the range 1.40/1–50m. It is

doubtless the type of road that the kings of Macedonia adopted in the fifth century BC when they started to develop their country. But what was the ultimate origin of such grooved roads?

We find many of these roads in the west, in Sicily (and also South Italy), where I have seen several traces. In Selinous, Akragas, Camarina, Syracuse, and Eloro (Copani (2005) 252–4 and 258) these roads apparently have a gauge of 1.32 or 1.50 metres (4 feet of 33 cm or 5 feet of 30 cm). The road of which there is a long stretch to the south of Eloro ([Figure 24.4](#)) seems to be a narrow way with a width of around 1.32 m. Traces of a road between Syracuse and Megara Hyblaia are also visible.



Figure 24.4 S.E. Sicily, south of Eloro (Torre Vindicari): long traces of ancient road

(photo: author).

Italian archaeologists supply some precious details. Thus in Camarina there is a road which leaves the town, crosses the cemeteries, and which, according to

these archaeologists, can be clearly dated to the early years of the sixth century BC (Pelagatti (1976/7) 523 and fig. 1; Di Stefano (1997/98) 745–50). In Syracuse Voza ((1976–77), 551–5)⁷ has discovered under a paved road of the Roman imperial era another paved road with wheel-ruts dating from the first century BC; under the latter, again, he found an earlier road with wheel-ruts which must be at the latest from the Hellenistic era. Here we have an example of a Greek road system disappearing under a Roman one.

Although the Greek cities in Dorian Sicily (Figure 24.5) also used this type of road, they are not the only ones in the West. In Messapia, J.L. Lamboley ((1996) 323–7) also noted the existence of a network of this kind with three different gauges. Initially, the width would have been of around 1.50 metres. Then in the second half of the fourth century BC (the arrival of Archidamos III c.342; Christien (2009)) the Tarentine foot was adopted, giving a gauge of 1.40 metres.⁸ Even if, as Lamboley says, we cannot date the origins of this kind of road precisely, the roads are ancient and did not originally depend on their Greek neighbour Taras for their gauge. Is this, then, an element that the western Greeks may have borrowed from local populations and made into a system? It is a simple, inexpensive system for rocky countries.



Figure 24.5 Syracuse (Sicily): double traces of road in the theatre
(photo: author).

24.6 Conclusions

Returning to our subject of Laconia, was it Sparta's need to conquer Messenia

that gave rise to the development of these roads? Or, conversely, was it the existence of these roads, by enabling the Laconians to explore beyond their mountains, that led to the conquest of Messenia and above all to its consolidation?

Beyond Laconia, historians and archaeologists now need to enrich their work by taking account of the new knowledge about roads. We can no longer proceed on the assumption that the Greek world depended on the Athenian system alone, which prioritized maritime routes. Scholars may have been ignoring a different system of transport, one which was perhaps much more important for the general population.

24.7 Laconian Quarries

The importance of quarries in the Greek and Roman worlds is a subject of increasing interest.⁹⁻¹⁰ The present writer's thirty-five years of research in Laconia have involved a large number of ancient quarries. Some are Greek, others Roman, but even the latter show signs, in most cases, of having been worked already during the era of Laconian independence (Christien (2014)¹¹). All the quarries mentioned in the present chapter have been personally examined in detail, except for those which seemed not to be of Greek origin. Our focus here is on the quarries which appear to have been used by the Laconians, that is between the eighth and second centuries BC. We shall see that, as with roads, Sparta's use of quarries has something to say about its political history.

Laconia suffered until recently from a lack of research on its quarries. This derived ultimately from Sparta's deliberately exclusive political constitution, which in the classical period tended to exclude it from the wider world of trade. The region is mentioned in modern studies concerning coloured marble, black marble from Tainaron, and rosso antico or green andesite from Krokeai, but these studies relate mainly to the Roman period. Unlike the Greeks, the Romans loved coloured marble.

However, a number of quarries on the Laconian coastline have encouraged new research. At the same time, there is a new interest both in ancient quarries generally and in those of Laconia in particular. Laconian quarries belong to several categories. On the one hand there are coastal quarries whose marble was used for export and on the other hand inland quarries for domestic use. The latter outnumber the former, and pose fewer historical problems. In addition, there are quarries of marble (or similar stone) and others of poros (or similar stone).

24.7.1 Inland Laconian quarries

Marble quarries: grey marble

The Laconians started working grey marble very early. They had a conveniently close source in the Taygetos Range above Amyklai. Did they open this quarry for the needs of the sixth-century sanctuary the Amyklaion or did the quarry exist already?

This quarry is at the head of a small ravine from which a road winds downhill allowing the transport of blocks of marble. Slightly to the north, on the same plateau of Platyvouni which overlooks Amyklai, there is a multiple quarry site, which apparently supplied Roman Sparta, with a branch road (Christien and Della Santa (2001/2) 211–16; CAL no.701, 193).

Although very near Sparta and easily accessible, these are not the only inland quarries of grey marble. Another source of this stone was in the valley of a tributary of the Kelephina (Oinous), a little to the north of Vresthena (around 20 kilometres north of Sparta). The marble is to be found in vertical strips, at the edge of the riverbed: [Figure 24.6](#). We have observed two mining-sites on the left bank of the stream, one at around two kilometres from the village, the other the large quarry (37°14'35.57"N, 22°30'11.79"E), three kilometres away. The latter seems to have produced, to judge by the copious remains, grey marble and a kind of yellow sedimentary stone. However, the southern edge of the quarry is of yellowish white marble. It was described by Lepsius (1890, 35–6) and evidently had the same appearance in his day. But it was reopened for the construction of a local church early in the twentieth century.



Figure 24.6 Vresthena, north of village. Carved stones on hilltop above the riverbed

(photo: author).

The celebrated Chrysapha reliefs (to the east of Sparta) were produced from material in a quarry to the south of that village, excavated in vertical strips (CAL no. 692, 189). Apparently a sculptor who lived in Chrysapha had opened a small local quarry, in order (we surmise) to celebrate the cult of Zeus Lakedaimonios (Christien (2010) 89–94).

Finally, a grey marble quarry exists also in the Taygetos Range (on the route from Thalamai or Kardamyle?), at Goranoi (CAL no. 700,192). This quarry is difficult to access, but Laconia of the second half of the sixth century BC seems to have had a fairly high level of production of statues (and of buildings?). Several sanctuaries had to be supplied with stone, not only in Sparta but also in its wider territory. Two or three teams may have worked simultaneously in connection with the exploitation of different sites.¹²

White marble: this marble is rarely found inland and anyway the Spartans preferred grey marble. However, the Spartan statue which today is the most famous of all comes from one of these sources and proves the importance of this other marble. The sculpture of Leonidas appears to have been made from yellowish white marble, with brown veins. The quarry was for long unidentified. Greek colleagues have now produced a survey of Laconian quarries, but even that did not succeed in answering the question. However, it is now clear: the marble for the Leonidas seems to have come from a plateau north of Vresthena (Figure 24.7) (37°14'20.57"N, 22°30'11.79"E). At an altitude of 800 metres, the plateau shows signs that marble was mined by

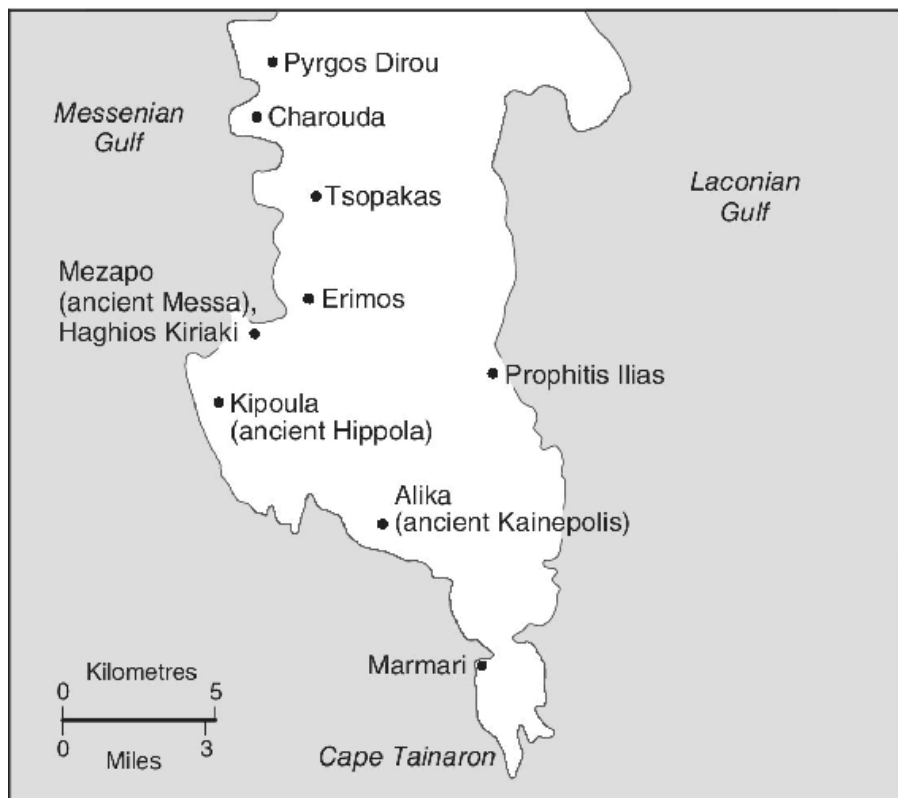
removing the surface material. There are huge blocks of marble *in situ*, which have been extracted in the traditional way but there is no cutting face, the marble deposit being shallow.



Figure 24.7 Vresthena, north of village. Large carved stone on hilltop

(photo: author).

It is possible that the large quarry ([Map 24.2](#), see further below) was an attempt at mining the vein of white marble by the same method as at the summit quarries at Platyvouni or at Gorani. However this vein only consisted of a thin crust and the workers would very rapidly reach the underlying sedimentary rocks.



Map 24.2 Quarries: Mani peninsula and Cape Tainaron.

At the edge of the river Kelephina we see another exploitation of white and grey marble and of yellow rock ($37^{\circ}14'22.07'N$, $22^{\circ}29'49.98'E$), and further to the south a small quarry of white marble ($37^{\circ}14'21.39'N$, $22^{\circ}29'46.40'E$) hidden in the trees. The region is called locally 'Ta Marmaria' ('the marble places').

Finally, further to the north, at the sources of the river Tanos, on the Laconian side, modern mining has recommenced on a summit quarry (Petrovouni, at an altitude of some 1,200–1,300 metres) which produces white marble, white marble with black veins, grey-white and dark-grey marble. The modern mining has now covered the ancient traces. This quarry is far away (some 40 kilometres) from Sparta but must have supplied the slabs of white marble that we find from the fourth century BC onwards. This marble is of a much better quality than that of Vresthena, but had to be transported from further away. A small sanctuary stands at the head of the Bambakou ravine (Boblaye (1836) 72) and has a road heading towards Sparta by way of the mountains.

24.7.2 Quarries of yellow sedimentary rock

At the edge of the river Eurotas (the bridge of Kopano, to the north of Sparta: Pikoulas ((2012) 602–5) there are gigantic quarries of clayish rock. How this stone was used remains to be discovered. It was also extracted in quarries north of Vresthena. The Kopano quarry demonstrates that huge blocks were mined. The small sanctuary called Leonidaion (at Sparta) is made of massive blocks of stone of this kind. They could also have been used for the defences of Sparta in the third and second centuries BC, of which the great walls, ten kilometres long, were built of brick on a foundation of stone.

24.7.3 Coloured stones

Between Gytheion and Sparta, the celebrated quarries at Krokeai, of green (Waterhouse and Hope-Simpson (1960) 106–7; Le Roy (1961) 208; Zezza and Lazzarini (2002) 260–1; CAL no. 668, 182) or violet andesite (which is less famous and less sought after but may be more abundant), seem not to have been used before the time of the Roman Empire. The stone is difficult to work, very fragmented and seems not to have been particularly appreciated in Sparta. It is possible, however, that at the end of Greek independence, with the development of mosaic, quarries of green stone, ‘green like grass’,¹³ were pressed into service. This stone, which had to my knowledge two veins at least, one to the north-east of Akriai, at the southern edge of the Kourloulou, near the poros quarry, the other on the old route from Marios to Kyphanta, at the exit from the Marios basin, was not Krokeai porphyry but was a completely green stone and used for mosaic (perhaps only in Roman times).

24.7.4 Coastal quarries

We often forget that, although Sparta itself is some forty kilometres from the sea, the state of Laconia had a long coastline. From the mouth of the Tanos in Thyreatis, in the north-eastern Peloponnese, to the river Neda in the north-west of Messenia, there are several hundred kilometres of coast. It is true that natural ports are rare but the inhabitants knew how to organize things: Gytheion, the harbour for Sparta, was an artificial port. The neighbouring harbour of Las, which can no longer be seen, being sanded up and the coastline having undergone straightening, could itself have been a natural port at the time. The author known as ps.-Skylax, text dating from around 350 BC, provides us with a list of Laconian ports (*Periplus* 46).

Sparta, which at an early date occupied the fertile plains of Messenia, did not need to organize trading. Its territory provided virtually all its own needs,

except for precious metals and tin. And there were even small, though insufficient, quantities of copper.¹⁴ However, the ports, on the headlands in particular, followed a very important maritime route which linked Asia Minor to the West. The Phocceans, Cnidians, Samians and Aiginetans successively must have made use of these harbours. The Persian Empire, which collected tribute, and above all the Athenian Empire, by organizing flows of trade mainly between Attica, the eastern basin of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, limited or interrupted these Mediterranean voyages. They restarted more sporadically when Syracuse intervened with its ships in the struggle against Athens after 413.

24.7.5 Marble quarries

Grey marble: One is struck, travelling in the Mani, to see so much deserted countryside with mounds of pebbles, bare slopes and rocky inhospitable coasts. The west side of the Mani contains, at altitudes of between 100 and 200 metres, a series of collapsed table-lands where, during the troubled period of the Middle Ages and in modern times, people took refuge. In Antiquity, however, Pausanias only mentions three ancient habitation sites situated towards the south of the peninsula, where ditches between geological faults have retained sediment producing a little cultivable earth. These are the promontory and the port of Messa (modern Mezapo), the city of Hippola on the table-land (modern Kipoula), and the city of Kainepolis (modern Alika), on the south coast. To the north of Mezapo a vast zone of table-lands seems to lack human settlement, no doubt because there is no water. On the other hand, there is marble.

There is grey marble practically everywhere in the Mani. It was mined at Marmari (grey-white marbles: CAL no. 696, 191) and to the north of Mezapo in quarries on the water. But there was also considerable mining of grey marble at Prophitis Ilias (36°30'19.88"N, 22°27'50.11"E) which scholars tend to overlook because of the interest in another rock exploited there, the rosso antico. However, to reach the vein of rosso antico, it was necessary to remove thick layers of grey marble, and it is possible that mining, that is summit mining of the kind carried on at Goranoi or Platyvouni, began as the mining of grey marble.

White marble was recently the subject of our research (Le Tallec and Christien (2014)) and it initially seemed to us that Laconia possessed little of this stone. However, experience of Vresthena changed our thinking and encouraged us¹⁵ to explore the Mani. This time we discovered, south of Areopolis, the ancient quarries whose existence Frederick Cooper had previously noticed ((1988) 67). Cooper's primary interest was in the peninsula of Tainaron. There is indeed at Marmari, as he suspected, a vein of white

marble and also of grey marble but the quantity available at this spot is small, indeed very small in relation to all that Cooper wished to define as marble of Laconian origin.

There is another quarry of white marble just to the north of the black marble in Tainaron but again it was apparently of little importance. (Admittedly, this white-marble quarry can be seen only from the sea, and is perhaps more important than it appears from the sea.)

White marble quarries (and also those of the grey-white variety) do indeed exist in the Mani but mainly to the north of the Tainaron peninsula. They are difficult to identify as they do not have a quarry face. They are of the type which required exploitation by removal of surface material, as at the summit of Vresthena Mountain.

24.7.6 From Areopolis to Mezapo

A quarry covers several hectares near Pyrgos Dirou at Phourtalía, close to the church of Hagios Ogdonda ($36^{\circ}37'20.02''\text{N}$, $22^{\circ}22'58.98''\text{E}$). The traces of marble workings extend towards the south, where a modern quarry has opened recently on the southern edge of the plateau ($36^{\circ}37'15''\text{N}$, $22^{\circ}22'51''\text{E}$), apparently on some ancient quarry markings.

The same applies to Charouda, where an inscription (*IG* V.1.1278–9) is to be seen in the wall of the church of Taxiarches ($36^{\circ}36'22.10''\text{N}$, $22^{\circ}22'14.62''\text{E}$), and where a sculptured relief dating from the sixth century BC has been found. The relief represents a hoplite and is currently in the Sparta museum; it confirms that this was an ancient site. A large modern quarry at the southern edge of the plateau has not been examined but it is possible that, as at Pyrgos/Phourtalía, the modern miners were guided by ancient traces in opening their quarry.

Towards the south, there are traces of ancient mining near the ruined palaeomaniate church of Trissachias, to the west of Tsopakas, and there are apparently others to the west and to the south-west of Kouloumi (the last point in the north–south chain of table-lands).¹⁶ At this spot Woodward ((1906/7) 242) saw, in a natural hollow, a relief of Herakles which implied the presence of miners and which strongly resembled the statue of Herakles at Plitra (ancient Asopos). But these sculptures are difficult to date: are they classical, Hellenistic or Roman? The remains of a statue in marble nearby appeared to Woodward to be of the third century BC. Such figures of Herakles play a dual role: he is the god of miners and also the god who accompanies the souls of the dead.

There were, it appears, three kinds (at three periods?) of mining in this area. One consisted of removing surface material, another of digging holes in order

to excavate a quarry face. (Such holes were reused at the time of the transformation of the Mani into a territory of refuge, when they were turned into water cisterns, next to the churches.) The layer of marble (sometimes with different colours) typically extends between 150 and 200 metres. It is fairly thin. A third type of mining consisted of steps to exploit the thin layer of marble at the edge of the plateau. This layer of stone slopes gradually towards the south and finally disappears to the south of Kouloumi. There we find the first quarry on the sea, to the west of Erimos.

In these stony landscapes, which were overpopulated at the time of the Turkish occupation, it is difficult to identify the remains of an ancient habitat. These places in fact have little arable land and few springs. They must have been used essentially for the mining of stone. In all these places there is beautiful, intensely white marble, often in the form of large crystals, but in a thin layer. Time has covered these marbles with a blackish slime, but the recent feverish reconstruction in the Mani has resulted in the opening of modern quarries and obviously the ancient sites were immediately targeted. At Pyrgos Dirou there is a horizontal quarry (so to speak) which it was decided to preserve ([Figure 24.8](#), at Phouritalia), but also a modern quarry near the sea on the top of the slope. This modern quarry clearly made use of an old quarry at the edge of the plateau which enabled the opening of quarry faces around three metres thick. Work at the Charouda quarry has advanced too far for us to tell what existed previously on the site. However, there are traces of ancient mining on this plateau and one such trace was converted into a cistern. So, we calculate that the general picture here resembled that near Pyrgos. At Tsopakas, as a result of the presence of palaeomaniate (and later) building, the operator was, to his annoyance, ordered to mine outside the archeological zone. The trench that he had started to dig reveals beautiful white marble.



Figure 24.8 Phouritalia (Pyrgos Dirou). White marble quarries in Mani (west coast)

(photo: author).

It is possible that the marble from this area was removed via Messa (modern Mezapo) where the remains of a road to the port are well preserved. The slope would have facilitated such removal and the small port was well sheltered.

I believe therefore that we need to revisit Cooper's ideas (1988, 74, and 1996, 112) and to renew the study in particular of the marbles used on the west coast of the Peloponnese. It is possible that the Mani supplied most of this coast, which has no sources of marble of its own up to and including Olympia (the same applies to poros).

Black marble: these quarries are better known both because they were mentioned in Antiquity and because they are visible from the sea.

The west coast of Cape Tainaron, in its southernmost recess, has huge quarries of dark grey and deep black marble (Figure 24.9). They were excavated over a long period. From the sixth century BC onwards, the Laconians proudly displayed this marble in Olympia (Le Tallec and Christien (2014)). In the sixth century BC, it was used there for Laconian seats. Pausanias pointed out that in front of the statue of Zeus there was paving of black marble (5.11.10); this was certainly an offering from the Laconians to the divine ancestor of their royal dynasties.



Figure 24.9 Tainaron. Black marble quarries

(photo: author).

The quarries close to the sea were obviously intended for the export of marble. Working conditions must have been very difficult in such an inhospitable place as Cape Tainaron. The resulting marble was in all likelihood rare and costly, and thus considered worthy of the gods and very likely associated with the god of the Cape, Poseidon. The earlier, Greek, quarries appear to be in the south; in the centre and the north there are Roman quarries. Another excavation can be seen further north, on the Cape, near Mianes, on top of a hill. The Romans greatly appreciated this marble. In the Greek era, although it signalled Spartan identity – or perhaps *because* of that – contemporary artists and their patrons could not decide how to use it. Around the turn of the fifth and fourth centuries BC, it was used for sculpture bases at Olympia, as for example the base of the statue of Kyniska, horse-racing sister of king Agesiلاس of Sparta.

The south of the small promontory of Teuthrone (modern Kotronas) also supplied black limestone, perhaps during the Hellenistic era, or only later.

24.7.7 Rosso antico

These quarries, north east of Cape Tainaron, were surveyed towards the middle of the nineteenth century (Dubois (1908) 105; Waterhouse and Hope-Simpson (1961) 119–20; CAL no. 699,192).¹⁷ Rosso antico is a dark red stone, viewed as a luxury. It was used during the Mycenaean period. Its

quarries seem to have been reopened from the late fourth or early third century BC onwards; they were intensively worked during the Roman era. Before the Roman period, this red marble was used for inscriptions: for example, an honorific decree for an inhabitant of Cythera dating from the third century BC (*IG* X.14.636) and another in honour of a Laconian dating from the beginning of the same century (*IG* X.14 717). This stone also appears in mosaics (perhaps from the middle of the third century) and, more unexpectedly, in the recently-discovered tombs of Spartan families (Raftopoulou (1998) 134–5). Unfortunately information is scarce. The British archaeologists Waterhouse and Hope-Simpson ((1961) 119–20) noted that there were traces of on-site work which would appear to predate the period at which we estimate quarrying of rosso antico to have occurred. However, this could be explained if, as I believe, grey marble had already been excavated on this site in the archaic and classical periods.

Other coloured stones – black, green and red – have been found near Mianes (summit of Tainaron), near Kotronas (ancient Teuthrone) and on the north bank of the Gulf of Scutari. They seem to be from the Roman era (Bruno (2002) 20–6) but future work, for example on Messapian mosaics (Masiello et al. (2013)), may well change our ideas concerning the periods at which these coloured stones were used.

24.7.8 Quarries of poros and similar stone

We have a large number of such quarries in Cape Malea – and also in the Mani which contains zones of both poros and marble.

On Cape Malea a belt of poros has been worked at several different places. On the south coast of Monemvasia, there are large quarries buried under sand but with traces still visible. The northern portions of these ancient quarries have been recently destroyed by the erection of housing. However, before being obliterated, these northern quarries had been reopened in modern times for the construction of Monemvasia.

Some twenty kilometres south of Monemvasia is a hill capped by a Greek fort (from which ancient pottery with black glaze has been recovered). The present writer believes this to be the site of Side (Christien (1989b) 92, with fig 1 and photo 8), much further north than has usually been thought but the last place on this coast with agricultural land capable of feeding a city. This hill overlooks, to the south, a basin sheltering the hamlet of Haghias Phokas. North of this last site there is a poros quarry (CAL no. 662,180).

On the west side of the Malea peninsula, Vinglapha, opposite the island of Elaphonissos, was the site of huge excavations. A port with several quays shows that stones were here loaded for enormous construction sites ([Figure](#)

24.3). Venetian quarries (overlooked by a small fort on a headland) in the north-east of the plain of Boiai (now Neapolis), which were perfectly visible forty years ago, and the road nearby, have been filled in and turned into fields. However, ancient quarries, situated at the north-western edge of the plain, can be still seen (CAL no. 689, 188; Christien (1989b) 89–90 and photos 5–8). These were intensively worked in Antiquity. This is perhaps the place where Apollon Lithisios stood (*IG* V.1. 213¹⁸). The quarries now are beginning to disappear under sheepfolds.

On the island of Cythera (on the east coast, at Scandia, the ancient harbour), we also find beautiful ancient quarries (Kokkorou-Alevras et al. (2011) 178–80; Christien (2014) 186, photo 2).

Going northwards along the coast of the gulf of Laconia we meet large poros quarries at ancient Asopos (Plitra) which have been well described by Kokkorou-Alevras et al. ((2009) 171–7). Used as a cemetery during the Roman period we can imagine that they had been worked for stone previously.

To the south of Asopos the promontory of Arkhangelo shows signs of a poros quarry.¹⁹ To the north of Asopos there was also a small quarry at Boza at the northern end of the promontory of Xyli. The traces of a road have now disappeared and the quarry has been destroyed.

In the Laconian gulf (north and west of Asopos) we have the site of Akriai at the foot of the mountain, near the remains of an ancient road, a quarry of poros seems to have been exploited for local use. At Gytheion, guided by an inscription of the sixth century BC,²⁰ we located a large ancient quarry to the east of the foot of Larysion. The inscription suggests that from the sixth century onwards the Laconian coast was a place where locally-quarried stone was employed.

24.7.9 In the Mani

Gytheion lies at the edge of Mani. Nearby, the west coast of northern Areopolis is fringed with Pliocene terraces which supplied fine benches of poros stone. On the slopes behind Leuktra, to the north of Thalamai (Cooper (1988) 67; CAL no. 711, 195), near Oitylos (CAL no. 679, 185), there are sizeable poros quarries. They were certainly used for the sanctuaries and walls of nearby towns fought over in the 360s BC between Thebans, who sought to annex them to Messenia, and Lacedaimonians whose myths told of episodes relating to their very identity which took place in these regions. Thalamai was reputed to be the region where the Dioscuri – Castor and Pollux – were born, as well as being the site of an old oracle. At Oitylos, the remains of the city walls are still visible in places, dating from the end of the fifth or more

probably the fourth century BC (Forster (1903/1904) 160–1).

Further south, in Mani proper, the terraces of poros disappear and poros exists only in low, compartmentalized, locations in this very fractured landscape. However, there are two huge, magnificent quarries, which must have been worked for export. One is to the south-west of Mezapo (ancient Messa) near Haghia Kyriaki (Woodward (1906–07) 243; CAL no. 677, 185) at the south foot of the Tigani, climbing towards ancient Hippola. There are Roman-era reliefs in the wall of the church of Kipoula (ancient Hippola), indicating that the quarries were also intended for local production. The other quarry is near ancient Kainepolis, close to the church of Alika (CAL no. 670, 183).

It seems that all these quarries may have been worked over a long period (down to the end of the Byzantine era?), as many local churches have large rectangular blocks in their walls (Hadjji Minaglou (1994)). The Alika quarry (Figure 24.10), in which the medieval village was built, is typical. The situation is similar for Thalamai and Haghia Kyriaki (south-west of Mezapo), where there are huge quarry faces; here one can clearly trace extraction in very long blocks, corresponding with the blocks used for the churches.



Figure 24.10 Alika (ancient Kainepolis). North side of the church square: large quarry of poros stone

(photo: author).

24.8 Conclusions

It is now clear that the headlands of Laconia supplied large quantities of stones for the buildings and sculptures of the Greek world. I consider that we must now revisit the ideas of Cooper ((1996) 108). He believes that the marble used at the fifth-century temple of Bassai in Arkadia resembles that found in other places north of Messenia: Alipheira, Mazi, Perivolia, Phigaleia and Olympia, in works dating from the end of the sixth to the beginning of the third centuries BC. In his 1988 study (p. 74) Cooper proposed that a whole series of objects, some of which were famous, were made of marble from Mani. This conclusion has much significance for the increasingly-contested topic of Spartan austerity. In the decades from the Great Earthquake of the mid 460s until the end of the fifth century Sparta produced, as Thucydides shows (1.10.2), no abundance of new showy buildings, a situation which continued until Hellenistic times. And yet Spartan territory contained much fine stone which could have supplied such buildings. Our study of Spartan quarries confirms that classical Sparta's famous abstention – from the 460s onwards – from grand building schemes was deliberate, reflecting a decision not to use available resources in certain ways. Sparta's attitude towards its own fine stone is comparable with its policy throughout the classical period of not minting local coins, in spite of an abundance – especially after the conquest of the Athenian empire – of gold and silver (Christien (2002)). Marble from Spartan territory was, during the classical period, used elsewhere in Greece to make a point about Sparta itself. But evidently the point to be made at home was a different one.

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NOTES

- 1 When working previously on the territory of Syracuse, I had already seen such traces of roads at the site of Eloro, around 20 kilometres south of Syracuse, and at Syracuse itself, even for the ascent to Epipolai and for access to the theatre. I was able to discuss the subject with members of the administration of Camarina who had discovered a whole hub of roads near Ragusa.
- 2 There is a brief introduction in the Laconia Survey (Cavanagh et al. (2002):

- Vol. I, 211–17). There is a more detailed bibliography in Gengler-Marchetti ((2000) 78–9).
- 3 I learned a short time afterwards that G. Pikoulas (see later below), who until then had worked in Megalopolis, had started to move south towards Laconia following the road network from the north.
 - 4 But, if I am correct, without giving an illustration.
 - 5 The invention of the GPS has greatly facilitated this type of work by allowing the different overall elements to be incorporated reliably in a map.
 - 6 Pikoulas (2012) includes a very efficient map, sadly unavailable for reproduction here. The present writer has supplied the present, partial, map ([Map 24.1](#)), based on her own researches.
 - 7 In a conversation in Camarina, he observed the existence of a problem regarding the hub of these roads near Ragusa.
 - 8 Lamboley has listed the characteristics: ‘the roads rarely take a straight line; they follow the contours of the landscape. and carefully avoid hollows, aiming to stick to the edges of terraces ... Their lines are often intended to allow rain water to drain’ ((1966) 325: trans. A.P.).
 - 9 A comprehensive survey of Greek quarries, together with extensive bibliography and illustrations, has recently been published. But, as in the case of roads, it is in Greek: G. Kokkorou-Aleuras, E. Poupaki, A. Efstathopoulos and A. Chatzikonstantinou, *C O R P U S A P X E I Ω N Λ A T O M E I Ω N* (Λατομεία του ελλαδικού χώρου από τους προϊστορικούς έως τους μεσαιωνικούς χρόνους) (= *Corpus of Ancient Quarries (Greek Quarries from Prehistoric Times to the Middle Ages)*). Athens. 2014. For Laconia and Messenia, see pp. 180–96. Hereafter this work is referred to as ‘CAL’. Easier to consult, and focused on Laconia, is: G. Kokkorou-Aleuras, A. Chatzikonstantinou, A. Efstathopoulos, E. Zavvou, N. Themis, K. Kopanias and E. Poupaki: ‘Ancient quarries in Laconia’ in: W.G. Cavanagh, C. Gallou and M. Georgiadis (eds), *Sparta and Laconia: From Prehistory to Pre-modern. (Proceedings of the Conference held in Sparta, organized by the British School at Athens, the University of Nottingham, the fifth Ephoreia of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities and the fifth Ephoreia of Byzantine Antiquities 17–20 March 2005.) British School at Athens Studies 16*. London, 2009, 169–77. However the only quarry closely examined here is that of Plitra (formerly Asopos), a poros quarry reused as a necropolis by the Romans.
 - 10 A sign of this is the various conferences regularly organised and published by ASMOSIA (‘Association for the Study of Marble and Other Stones

used in Antiquity’).

- 11 Cf. also Le Tallec, in Y. Le Tallec and J. Christien, ((2014) 149–70).
- 12 For example, two rural sanctuaries have been excavated at Akriai and Aigai. The small, obscure sanctuary at Aigai produced two large grey marble statues, a goddess on a throne and a kouros. The latter is wearing little boots like the Twins of Delphi (probably the Dioscuri, the offering of an Argive who may have worked in Laconia): Bonias ((1998) 38–64, in Greek). Curiously the Survey of Laconia (Vol. II, 294), refers to the quarries of Platyvouni and of Goranoi as being of white marble. They are of grey marble! Cf. Christien (2014, photo 6).
- 13 See the Roman authors Statius (*Silvae* 2.2.90–1) and Martial (*Epigr.* 6, 42, 11–13): both refer to green stone and Statius to ‘green as grass’. The green stones that the present writer has seen were not in the Taygetos Mountains. Perhaps, however, the Roman authors were alluding to the green stone of Tainaron, which is at the extremity of the Taygetos Range. There, above Kisternes, is found a green and white stone (and another of pink and white, nowadays called ‘peach flower’), that was exploited in Roman times. Further study is needed of the Tarentine and Messapian mosaics, which might reveal whether exploitation of green stone started earlier.
- 14 This allows us to answer a question raised by Stibbe ((2009) 156) concerning the number of bronzes in the temple of Apollon Hyperteletas. There is a mine of good quality copper about three kilometres north of the temple, which may have sufficed for a local craftsman.
- 15 On this occasion with Ms Maria Mylona, a government officer in charge of the environment at Molai. Our first expedition to Vresthena (inland) and Kouloumi (west coast of Mani) was made in 1994. Ms Mylona’s cooperation was essential for obtaining the necessary information.
- 16 A Greek researcher announced in CAL that several articles on these quarries would be published. As regards Kouloumi, the presence of marble ruins and signs of extraction had been noted by A.M. Woodward as early as 1906–7.
- 17 Italian quarry-workers had reopened an excavation at the end of the nineteenth century. The site as it existed before this reopening was described by Charles Dubois ((1908) 105–6): ‘The quarries of red marble are to be found above Dimaristika, near the little church of Haghios Helias. On the slopes, right next to the church, are four quarries with steep sides containing scattered lumps of debris. We can also see a number of blocks and the traces of a path marked out among the rocks for the transport of marble – above the layers of red marble can be found grains of a greenish seam – In that place, several large layers were actively worked in Antiquity

–’. On this site the present writer has seen grey limestone (‘greenish-grey’ might be more accurate), which had been actively worked.

- 18 We know from Stephanus of Byzantium (s.v. Αἰθήσιοις) that this god had a cult in Malea.
- 19 The ancient road between Asopos and Kotyrta (modern Daimonia) divided into two shortly before Kotyrta, one branch leading in the direction of the acropolis, the other to the coast where it ran alongside a temple and quarries before going downwards towards the south. One can still see traces of it under the sea at Marathias. This road seems not to have been noticed by Pikoulas. The present writer has seen traces where the road began its descent to the coast and, some kilometres further, the traces under the sea. In Antiquity this was a coastal road.
- 20 F. Ruzé and H. Van Effenterre ((1994) 318–19). Autopsy of the present writer confirms there was indeed a large quarry. Since the prohibition on removing stones dated from the sixth century BC, the quarry had presumably been open before then. Was it reserved for Laconians? Its situation at the port of Gytheion must have caused it to be highly prized.

CHAPTER 25

Spartan Cultural Memory in the Roman Period

Nigel M. Kennell

The Spartans of the Roman period were famous. In the words of Cicero (*Flacc.* 63), they were “the only people in the whole world who have lived now for more than seven hundred years with one and the same set of customs and unchanging laws”. Roman Sparta was typified by its citizens’ desire to advertise themselves as unique, particularly in their adherence to venerable custom (see Lafond, [Chapter 15](#), this volume). On the other hand, the city’s later periods of unrest, revolution, and impotence were also well known (Strabo 8.5.5; Plut. *Philop.* 16.9; *Inst. Lac.* 42 [239e–240e]; cf. Philostr. *VA* 17). These apparently contradictory perceptions of contemporary Sparta’s relationship with its history expose the tension between the historical record and Sparta’s powerful later image as a city whose institutions and traditions were vital embodiments of the Hellenic past. With this in mind, the literary, epigraphical, and even archaeological evidence for Roman Sparta, scanty though it is, provides the means for understanding how one particular group, the Spartans, articulated a cultural memory informed by a (largely) created past which they utilized to protect and further their interests during years of domination by the external power of Rome.

Cultural memory is to a society what individual memory is to a person (Assmann (2011) 4–5, 26). While the analogy has some shortcomings, in that a society has no physical neural networks, the term does usefully characterize the preservation through various institutions, both cultural and social, of the knowledge of certain events or persons and the sinking into oblivion of others. The set of things whose remembrance is the function of cultural memory forms a sort of canon for a society (Assmann (2008) 100–2). They are recalled, lived out, and celebrated through festivals, monuments, and especially at specific locations (*lieux de mémoire*), which provide strong stimuli for remembrance. That which is commemorated in this way need not be historically accurate, or even true, but it still constitutes the essence of a group’s identity and individuality and, as such, is held to be unchanging through time.

A past must be selected and constructed, processes that typically occur after some form of break – social, political, or religious – in continuity (Assmann (2011) 18–19, 248–9, cf. 39). After the defeat and exile of King Kleomenes

III (235–222 BC), who briefly managed to restore a portion of Sparta's old status through his military and social reforms, the city certainly suffered major ruptures in its institutional and social fabric during the second and first centuries BC, despite later claims to Spartan continuity. First came enforced membership in the Achaean League from 186 to 146 BC (on these dates, see later below) and the loss of “ancestral” institutions such as the citizen training system, called the *agōgē* from the Hellenistic period onwards. Only after the Roman victory over the Achaeans in 146 BC were Spartans able to recover what was called their ancestral constitution, and even then only in limited fashion (Plut. *Philop.* 16.9; Paus. 8.51.3). But the restored city was significantly diminished even from its years under the rule of Nabis (205–192 BC), the last independent Spartan ruler before the Achaean hegemony. Now Sparta no longer controlled most of Laconia, let alone long-independent Messenia, for the old perioecic cities had formed the Lacedaemonian League at Nabis' fall, when helotage also disappeared, with helots probably comprising a notable portion of the new League's population (Kennell (1999)). Although post-Achaean Sparta appears to have shared in the relative prosperity enjoyed by other Greek cities in the later second century, with almost completely tranquil relations with its former dependent cities, Rome's civil wars soon swept over the city, as over mainland Greece generally. Spartans were not foolish enough to ally themselves with the Pontic king Mithridates in his anti-Roman crusade – indeed they may have provided troops for Sulla's Italian campaign (App. *BC* 1.79) – but insatiable requisitioning by Roman generals would soon ravage Laconia (App. *BC* 1.102). Laconian cities such as Gytheion were forced to accept loans at exorbitant interest rates to pay off the debts they incurred meeting Roman demands (*IG* V.1 1146), and even Sparta itself was in desperate straits following another extortionate tax assessment (*IG* V.1 11; cf. Cic. *Verr.* 1.60, 2.80).

On the whole, though, Sparta was lucky in its manoeuvring during these perilous years. While it had supported Pompey against Caesar (Caes. *BC* 3.4.3), the city won a favourable decision in its boundary dispute with the Messenians in 44 BC (Tac. *Ann.* 4.43) and switched allegiance, sending troops to aid Octavian against the republicans at Philippi (Plut. *Brut.* 41.8, 46.1). Nonetheless, this did not prevent Sparta being treated as a pawn later, when the Treaty of Misenum (39 BC) ceded control of the Peloponnese to Sextus Pompey for five years (Vell. Pat. 2.77.2; App. *BC* 5.72). Although the treaty soon became a dead letter, Antony had an excuse for another round of oppressive requisitioning in the region (App. *BC* 5.77, 80). When the civil wars drew to a close and the former allies Octavian and Antony fell out, Sparta found itself in an unusually advantageous position. Eurycles, the son of a prominent local man (*IG* II² 3885) executed as a pirate by Antony (Plut. *Ant.* 67.3), personally commanded a contingent of ships on Octavian's side at the battle of Actium. The victor awarded Sparta the presidency of the Actian

Games at Nikopolis (Strabo 7.7.6; Plut. *Ant.* 67.2–3) and installed Eurycles himself in power at Sparta (Strabo 8.5.1, 5.5), where he and his descendants, with some notable interruptions, exercised considerable sway until the end of Nero's reign (Kennell (2010) 183–6), probably without holding any official position, in a style reminiscent of archaic tyranny (Kennell (1997) 351–4, 356; Balzat 2005).

Attempts by modern historians to assign to Eurycles and his descendants a constitutional position through which they wielded power at Sparta have foundered on the ambiguous or contradictory evidence (Balzat 2005). Strabo's references (8.5.1, 5.5) to Eurycles as leader (*hēgemōn*) and to his power (*epistasia*) have particularly resisted explanation. Legends on coins minted in Eurycles' name, for instance, indicate that they were struck "in the time of Eurycles" or "at the expense of Eurycles" (Grunauer-von Hoerschelmann (1978) 63–71, taf. 19–21). Moreover, while his children may have joined elite religious groups (*IG* V.1 141), the few scraps of epigraphical evidence available from the first century BC seem to show the revived Kleomenean constitution functioning smoothly. In the early 20s the ephors and the city addressed a letter to the city of Delphi (*IG* V.1 1566); a list of *patronomoi*, Roman Sparta's eponymous magistrates, from six consecutive years in the first century indicates that upper-class Spartans continued to fill positions in this Kleomenean institution (on the patronomate, later below and Kennell (1997); *pace* Lafond, this volume, [Chapter 15](#)). As well, bricks from the second half of the first century BC were stamped with names of *patronomoi* (Kourinou (2000) 54–7). Euryclid power actually rested on imperial favour, traceable back to the official friendship (*amicitia*) Augustus bestowed on Eurycles. Political life, at least the advertising by the elite of their achievements on behalf of their city, seems to have been dormant, if not actually suppressed in this period, only to develop again following the end of the family's power in the Flavian period.

The excavators of Sparta's late-Hellenistic or early-Roman theatre on the south-west flank of the acropolis tentatively suggest that the change in government may be associated with a radical transformation in the theatre's fabric in 78 AD and the first inscribed careers of prominent Spartans, which appeared soon after on the east *parodos* wall (Walker and Waywell (2001) 294). The theatre is a good place to begin an examination of how cultural memory manifested itself at Roman Sparta. In fact, it might stand as an emblem of that phenomenon. Built under Eurycles, the theatre boasted an unusual feature, a movable scene building of a type now attested also in the theatre at Messene (Walker and Waywell (2001) 294). Its construction methods were up-to-date, with Roman-style foundations of layered rubble and concrete. Despite this modernity, and of course the incongruity of a theatre at a Sparta increasingly self-conscious about its tradition of austere rejection of the arts in any form, its exterior aspect was thoroughly Greek, even

classicizing, in its use of stone and Pentelic marble in the Doric style – “a grandiose recreation of the fine Classical Greek theatre design ... stressing in its appearance the Dorian heritage of Sparta” (Waywell, Wilkes, and Walker (1999) 103).

Eurycles dominated political life in a fashion that was more characteristic of a Roman “strong man” (Balzat (2007) 343) than of a Spartan leader but he may well have had a hand in the concerted promotion of aspects of Spartan “tradition” which formed the core of the city’s cultural memory. The Leonideia, games in honour of the hero of Thermopylai, which were reorganized in the late first century AD (*IG* V.1 18–19), may have been first resurrected or even founded under Eurycles, with orators delivering *encomia* of Leonidas and Pausanias, victor of Plataia, at the new theatre (Spawforth (2012) 122–30). In addition, it is possible that Eurycles was responsible for the remodelling of the famous Persian Stoa with columns of “white marble”, building material characteristic of the Augustan age (Paus. 3.11.3; Spawforth (2012) 118–20). Augustus’ visit to Sparta in 22/1 BC signalled not only his support for Eurycles, at least for the time being, but also his approval of the martial Spartan values the training system (*agōgē*) had come to represent by his joining the Spartan ephebes in their common meals (*phiditia*) (Strabo 8.5.1; Dio Cass. 54.7.2; Paus. 3.26.7, 4.31.1; Spawforth (2012) 90–1). Whether Eurycles took an active role in promoting the *agōgē* as a Spartan tradition cannot be determined due to the lack of evidence from this period, but in the later first and second centuries AD, when inscriptions become more plentiful, the training system had undoubtedly become a key component of Spartan cultural memory and the main vehicle by which Spartans represented themselves to themselves and the world.

The *agōgē* of the Roman era was the product, after two periods of desuetude, of revivals, the first under Kleomenes III and the second after the Roman victory over the Achaean League in 146 BC. At that time the imperial power approved Sparta’s recovery of her “ancestral” institutions, as far as was practical after the city’s misfortunes and so much degeneration, according to Plutarch (*Philop.* 16.9), following four decades (188–146 BC) of forced membership in the Achaean League under an Achaean-style constitution in which Spartan youths were no longer trained in the Spartan way (Livy 38.34.9). Recent doubts as to the likelihood of Roman involvement in the revival of the *agōgē*, and that traditional citizen training at Sparta was actually in abeyance for all forty years of the Achaean period (Lévy (1997) 153; Ducat (2006) x–xi), stem from a misapprehension about the significance of ephebates to the Hellenistic city. As a source of citizen soldiers, these training systems were quite definitely an object of interest to the ruling powers such as the Romans, as recent research has made clear (Chaniotis (2005) 46–51; Kennell (2005) 19–20). Roman permission to revive the *agōgē* would have been, if not needed, then certainly desirable.

Although the latest revival of the *agōgē* just after 146 BC would have taken place within the limits of the communal memory of aged Spartans, the training system they recalled, which served as the model, was not the Classical system but that revived under Kleomenes III. Thus, true continuity between the Classical training system and that of the Roman period is tenuous at best and arguably non-existent. In any case, even were the Roman-era institution to reproduce the Classical in every detail, every act of revival entails a break from the natural evolution of a tradition and a conscious effort to reconstruct a past that is relevant to the present.

Since the Archaic period, maturation rituals for both males and females had been performed at the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia near the Eurotas river. In the third century BC, the goddess's cult statue appeared on coins struck by King Kleomenes, thus advertising the training system's prominence in his reform programme. It has been suggested that he was also responsible for reconstructing Artemis' temple (Grunauer-von Hoerschelmann (1978) 11–16, gr. III). Kleomenes' institution of the patronomate (*pace* Lafond, this volume), whose main charge at least later was oversight of the *agōgē*, also points to its centrality in his vision of Sparta (Kennell (1995) 11). The earliest eyewitness to the *agōgē* of Roman Sparta is Cicero, who, like Libanios our latest witness (*Or.* 1.23), confined himself to mentioning the infamous contest of endurance (*Tusc.* 2.34, 2.46, 5.77), when naked youths submitted to flagellation by the altar of Orthia to mark their coming of age. The ritual had been drastically transformed from an earlier ceremony involving a battle with whips over cheeses placed on Artemis' altar (*Xen. Lak. Pol.* 2.9) either under Kleomenes in the third century BC (Kennell (1995) 79) or at a later date after the restoration of the Spartan constitution in 146, with some even detecting Augustan influence (Spawforth (2012) 92–4). At any rate, the bloody spectacle suited Roman views of Spartan toughness and contributed to the establishment of a well-defined Spartan civic identity within the Roman Empire.

Apart from the Endurance Contest, Spartan youths also competed in several less violent events whose names, in an artificial version of the ancient Laconian dialect, were redolent of antiquity. The *mōa* was a singing contest, the *keloia* a competition in hunting calls, and the *kaththēration* a hunting dance. This last seems earlier to have been called the *kunagetas* or “hunter” – a name appearing in three very fragmentary inscriptions from the first century BC (*IG* V.1 260, 267, 268) – and to have acquired its more recondite name sometime in the Flavian period, thus displaying the process of Laconization in keeping with an increased emphasis on Spartan “heritage” in the later first and second centuries AD. Ironically, its former name, *kunagetas*, is itself an artificial creation whereby a Doricised version of the Attic word *kunēgetēs* was preferred to the proper Doric form, *kunagos* (Kennell (1995) 51–4).

Language in the *agōgē* also functioned in a more systematic way to preserve

and promote Spartan cultural memory, in the inscribed victory dedications. From as early as the fourth century BC evidence survives that victors (more accurately, their fathers) erected bronze sickles won in the singing and dancing contests that were attached to stone slabs (*stēlai*) as dedications in the sanctuary of Artemis (IG V.1 255). After a lengthy hiatus, these sickle dedications appear again in the first century, with texts in a lightly Doricised form of the *koinē* (common) dialect of Hellenistic Greek. In the second century, however, words in some inscriptions appear in what is supposed to be the ancient Laconian dialect spoken in the sixth and fifth centuries BC. Use of artificial archaizing forms increases through the century to the point where even Roman names such as *Iulius* (Julius) are given Spartan form, producing oddities such as *Ioulior* (Kennell (1995) 87–92).

The evocation of Sparta's primitive origins can be seen also in the later *agōgē*'s structure. For much of the Roman period, youths passed through an elaborate five-step system of age grades from ages sixteen to twenty, each with an archaizing name: *mikkichizomenos*, *pratopampais*, *hatropampais*, *melleirēn*, and *eirēn*. Within each grade, youths served in *bouai* (cattle herds) under *bouagoi* (cattle leaders), terms heavy with pastoral imagery. Each *boua* was notionally attached to one of Sparta's ancient, and apparently obsolete, *ōbai* or villages, which, clustered against the low hills forming the upper city, had famously survived unwallled until the Hellenistic period. Passing out of the *agōgē*, young Spartan *eirenes* competed in a ball contest in the city's theatre in teams of *sphaireis* (ballplayers) representing the ephebic *ōbai* (Kennell (1995) 28–41). The *sphaireis* game, like the theatre where it took place, is typical of how later Sparta preserved aspects of its cultural memory. Alone among the ephebic contests attested in the Roman period, it has an unimpeachable Classical pedigree, appearing in Xenophon's *Constitution of the Lakedaimonians* (9.5) as a contest open to all Spartan warriors (Kennell (1995) 131). Since the Spartans also claimed to have invented ball-playing (Hippasos *ap. Athen. Deipnos*. 1.25 (FGH IV 430)), the incorporation of the *sphaireis* game into the *agōgē* as a coming-of-age ritual can be viewed as a part of the training system's later role as the pre-eminent repository of Spartan memory.

Thus, visitors to Sparta in the mid-second century would have witnessed ephebes contending in the theatre in a competition Spartans claimed as their own, and at the sanctuary of Artemis participating in ancient-sounding contests, divided into age grades and teams whose names evoked the original districts of the city. They would have seen *stēlai* around Artemis' temple and altar bearing tangible witness to the Roman city's continuity with its illustrious past. In addition, I believe they may have heard the ancient dialect spoken once again during the various ceremonies of the *agōgē* (Kennell (1995) 87–93). The effect would have been powerful, to say the least.

The *agōgē*'s importance as the primary vehicle by which Spartans of the

Roman period engaged with their cultural memory is thrown into relief when one considers how unexceptional were the other aspects of life in the city. The public institutions of Roman Sparta, though ephors and the *gerousia* still existed, exhibit few differences from those of other provincial cities of the Greek East (Kennell (1985); Cartledge and Spawforth (2002) 143–59). Houses excavated under the modern city show a Spartan elite that enjoyed the luxurious *rentier* lifestyle found everywhere in the empire, in urban villas boasting private bathing facilities, attached workshops, and a wealth of elaborate mosaics to decorate their floors, while Roman-era cemeteries are typical of their period (Spyropoulos, Mantis, et al. (2012) 94–5). Thus, Sparta’s urban fabric in the second and third centuries of our era as revealed by (mostly) salvage excavation was that of a prosperous middling settlement, with public amenities such as baths, gymnasia and broad streets, including at least one street lined by colonnades (Steinhauer (2009) 273). Although the city was by no means a “theme park” or “museum of living history” during the Roman period, it cannot be denied that many of the ways in which cultural memory was performed and expressed in cities of the Greek East are most evident and fully articulated at Sparta.

Through regular performances of the ceremonies in the *agōgē*, Spartans re-enacted the most salient features of their traditions. The message of the city’s fidelity to its ancient heritage was also carried by buildings and areas within the city that functioned as *lieux de mémoire* for visitors and citizens alike through their evocations of mythological and historical events, often linked to the activities of ephebes, central to Spartan self-perception. Pausanias, author of a well-known second-century guide to the antiquities of Greece, remains our main informant, due to the paucity of archaeological remains.

At the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia, the temple retained throughout the Roman period the form Kleomenes had given it in the late third century BC, while the altar was significantly enlarged, surely to make room for those undergoing the rigours of the Endurance Contest. Monumentalization to accommodate spectators also began at this time – a sign of the conscious appreciation of the *agōgē*’s importance to Spartan cultural memory – in the form of stone seats for distinguished visitors, probably in the second half of the first century BC (*IG* V.1 254). Not until late in the third century, in fact after the devastating incursion of the Heruli into the Peloponnese in AD 267, was built the site’s most visible structure, the amphitheatral seating for the mass of visitors attracted to the whipping contest, which was so vital that it was still held in the 340s (*Lib. Or.* 1.23).

Just north of the sanctuary, Pausanias saw the shrine of Sparta’s legendary lawgiver Lykourgos, whom Spartans worshipped as a god (3.16.6). Although the British excavators at the beginning of the twentieth century hopefully identified it with a large Hellenistic altar they found in the area (Dickins (1905–6)), the identification has been authoritatively refuted (Kourinou

(2000) 149–51). As is now appreciated, Lykourgos was a totemic figure for Spartans in the Roman period. A shadowy figure even to scholars in antiquity (Plut. *Lyc.* 1–3), Lykourgos was supposed to have lived in the earliest days of Spartan history. Unanimous consensus credited him with the establishment of almost every institution and custom, usually held to be legally binding, that had characterized Sparta’s supposedly unique style of life and had brought Spartans hegemony over the Greeks. With the *agōgē*’s function in the Roman period as the primary vehicle for the expression of Spartan exceptionalism, Lykourgos was its natural figurehead. The *agōgē* was called the “Lykourgan customs”, and *patronomoi* were sometimes honoured for their presidency (*epistasia*) of the customs (e.g. *IG V.1* 500, 527, 543, 544), probably in return for providing financial subsidies (Kennell (1995) 44). As with venerable codes of law, the Lykourgan customs had their own interpreters (*IG V.1* 177, 554; see *DS* 13.53.3) and teachers (*IG V.1* 500, 542, 543). Lykourgos was also responsible for the Endurance Contest, though the Roman-era version was so different from the ritual described by Xenophon (*Lak. Pol.* 2.9) six centuries previously that the account Pausanias heard (3.16.9–11), crediting Lykourgos with the founding of the contest he witnessed, can only have been a relatively recent invention (Kennell (1995) 78–9). At the city’s theatre, Lykourgos’ statue stood in front of the lists of officials and careers of notable Spartans that were inscribed on the east *parodos* wall and overlooked the site of the *sphaireis* contest that marked passage from the *agōgē* to the community of adult citizens (Kennell (1995) 62). On the occasions when Sparta’s coffers were depleted, Lykourgos himself assumed the office of *patronomos*, although mortal proxies (*epimelētai*) carried out his actual duties in the *agōgē* (Kennell (1995) 43–4). For Spartans in the Roman period Lykourgos was a emblematic figure. Assigned definitely to Sparta’s distant past, with his role as the creator of the Spartans’ distinctive style of life and with the continuing evolution or even invention of stories about him, Lykourgos’ function was to stimulate and focus memory on a major element of Spartan traditions (Assmann (2011) 23–8).

Other elements of those traditions can also be traced in the urban topography of Roman Sparta. A statue of Lykourgos and another of Herakles, both probably of Hellenistic or later manufacture, presided over the bridges to an island surrounded by plane trees called the Platanistas (Plane-Tree Grove), where two teams of ephebes met in combat with each other (Paus. 3.14.7–10). A recent study has placed the Platanistas in the well-watered region of the Mousga river north of the acropolis and north-west of the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia, where the landscape may show signs of the river having been dammed in antiquity in order to create an artificial lake suitable for the Platanistas island (Sanders (2009) 199–200). Herakles and Lykourgos, both evoking powerful associations for Spartans, here unite two threads of cultural memory: the creation of the Spartan state and its laws (Lykourgos) and the Spartan claim to possession of Laconia (Herakles) and by extension Messenia,

both of which would be recalled through the actions of Spartan ephebes.

Lykourgos' role is obvious, but the figure of Herakles leads to another narrative which continued to hold rich meaning for later Spartans: the conflict between Herakles and the sons of Hippokoon. In preparation for the Platanistas fight, ephebes sacrificed puppies at the Phoibaion near Therapne, south-east of the city (Paus. 14.9), which has been seen as an allusion to a key incident in this myth (Gengler (2005) 318). The Spartan version can be reconstructed as follows. Herakles came to Sparta seeking purification for his killing of Iphitos, but Hippokoon, now king of Sparta after dethroning his brother Tyndareus, refused. Herakles' cousin Oionos killed a dog belonging to the sons of Hippokoon (Hippokoontidai) after it attacked him. In revenge, they bludgeoned Oionos to death. Enraged, Herakles set upon Hippokoon and his sons but was wounded and so withdrew to Taygetos, where Asklepios tended him. Returning to Sparta, Herakles killed all his new enemies and set up sanctuaries and trophies, while according heroic honours to Oionos and the Hippokoontidai (Paus. 3.15.1–5; Gengler (2005) 317).

Near the theatre, venue for the *sphaireis* game, Herakles founded the sanctuary of Hera the Goat Eater (*Aigophagos*) in return for her allowing his revenge on Hippokoon and his sons (Paus. 3.15.9). In the area of the Platanistas were located the *hērōa* of the Hippokoontidai Alkimos, Enaiphoros, Dorceus, and Sebrios, while a little further away at the ephebic exercise ground known as the Dromos (Racecourse) was another *hērōon*, to Hippokoon's son Alkoon (Sanders (2009) 198), and nearby, the sanctuary of Athena of Just Requit (Axiopoinos), another related foundation of Herakles (Paus. 3.15.6). Close by, Eumedes, a sixth son, had his tomb near a statue of Herakles, to whom the *sphaireis* sacrificed (Paus. 3.14.6). Herakles' retreat from Sparta and his victorious return, like other related myths, had long served to mirror and justify Heraklid, and Spartan, claims to control of Laconia and the southern Peloponnese (Calame (1987)). In the Roman period, notable families recorded their descent from Herakles, to the exact number of generations, to mark their inherent right to dominate public life through magistracies and hereditary priesthoods. Tyndareus and his sons, Kastor and Polydeukes, were also popular ancestors (e.g. *IG* V.1 529, 536, 559, 562), since they fought beside Herakles against the Hippokoontidai, a detail suppressed by Pausanias (Calame (1977) 2.52–9).

This particular genealogy also had territorial implications, for in the Messenian version Tyndareus spent part of his exile in the district of Thalamai in Messenia near the border with Laconia, where the Dioskouroi were born on the islet of Pephnos (Paus. 3.26.2–3). According to the Spartans, by contrast, Tyndareus went to Pellana north-west of Sparta, so the Spartan genealogies serve to counter Messenian pretensions. They may also have expressed, if not a desire for some sort of hegemony over the cities of the Free Laconian League, then the Spartan position in the ongoing border disputes over this and

other areas between the Messenians and Laconians (Gengler (2005) 328; cf. Tac. *Ann.* 4.43). Back in the area of the Platanistas, near the tomb of Alkman, whose poem *Partheneion* may have concerned the rivalry between the Hippokoontidai and Dioskouroi, were shrines of Helen and, closer to the city wall, of Herakles, where one could see an armed statue of the god as if in combat with the sons of Hippokoon (Paus. 3.16.3).

Helen, sister to Kastor and Polydeukes, figures in several myths which left traces in the topography of Sparta. Pausanias mentions a sanctuary of Artemis Knagia, named after a certain Knageus who joined Kastor and Polydeukes on their expedition to Attica to rescue their sister (Paus. 3.18.4). Possibly located somewhere in the northeast of the city, though its exact position is unknown (Kourinou (2000) 99), the sanctuary may have marked the route Kastor and Polydeukes took out of the city and would have lain within the urban area most associated with ephebic activity. Although cult worship of Helen and her husband Menelaos on the promontory east of the Eurotas died out in the Hellenistic period, she and the Dioskouroi were objects of a lively cult during the Roman empire at the Phoibaion sanctuary on the west bank of the Eurotas just outside the city on the southeast (Kourinou (2000) 202–3) where, as mentioned above, the *sphaireis* teams sacrificed before proceeding to the city's centre (Cartledge and Spawforth (2002) 195). Within the city walls, Helen's shrine was one of several sites that prompted remembrance of stories associated with Sparta's role in the Trojan War. Near the Dromos one could visit the house of Menelaos, where his marriage to Helen took place (Paus. 3.14.6; Sanders (2009) 199).

Sparta's most important and historic street was the Aphetais road running southwards to the city wall from the agora, which is now securely identified as the plateau on Palaiokastro hill lying to the east of the acropolis (Kourinou (2000) 104–8). The road's name, the "starting", supposedly came about because Ikarios set it out as the race course for the suitors of his daughter Penelope in the contest that was won by Odysseus (Paus. 3.12.1). Nearby was the statue of Aphetaios, where the race began (Paus. 3.13.6). As they went along the Aphetais, passers-by would have seen the three sanctuaries of Athena of the Path (*Keleutheia*) which Odysseus erected some distance apart, starting with the one just south of the agora (Paus. 3.12.2–5; Kourinou (2000) 137–8). Penelope herself was another memory figure in the Roman period, with the title "New Penelope" available to noble women who emulated her in wifely virtue (*IG* 5.1 598, 599). Towards the end of his itinerary along the Aphetais, after noting some of the most ancient shrines in the city, such as the *hērōa* of Iops and of Lelex, the aboriginal king of Lakeldaimon (Calame (1987)), Pausanias comes upon an area called the Hellenion, where, according to one story, the Achaeans met to plan revenge on Paris for his outrage on Menelaos. This particular Spartan account draws on the old assertion of a prominent role for Spartans in the pre-Dorian Peloponnese, which probably

was also the impetus for, among other things, the establishment of the cult of Kassandra-Alexandra and Agamemnon at Amyklai, another sanctuary obviously evocative of the Trojan myth (Salapata (2011); see also Hall (1997) 91–3).

Objects and places linked to major characters in Homeric epic formed a loose web of associations to prompt memory of the great mythical Panhellenic campaign against an eastern enemy, whose central element was the Spartan location where Greeks met to plan the war of vengeance for the wrong done to Menelaos. In light of this, it is unsurprising that the Hellenion exercised another claim on the collective memory, for here Spartans held that the Hellenic states had assembled to prepare their defence against an even greater eastern menace: Xerxes' invasion of 480 BC (Paus. 3.12.6). Though the local tradition was unhistorical – the Hellenic coalition met at the Isthmos of Corinth (Hdt. 7.172.1) – it does reflect the later Spartans' intense identification with the period of what had long been considered their city's finest achievement: leading the Greek cities in the Persian Wars. This acquired greater immediacy after the Romans under Augustus adopted rhetoric and symbolism associated with the Persian Wars in their conflicts with the Parthians (Spawforth 1994), and they were no longer “a normal historical occurrence, but a founding myth, which marked the consecration of Hellenism as such” (Pernot (1993) 2:452).

Around the Hellenion were several other sites to excite reminiscences of this crucial period in the city's history. Nearby was the tomb of Talthybios, herald to king Agamemnon, where the Trojan and Persian Wars were bound together, for, as Pausanias relates, it was his wrath that afflicted the Athenians and the Spartans for their maltreatment of the ambassadors Darius had sent to demand earth and water (Paus. 3.12.7; Hdt. 7.133). Maron and Alpheios, second only to Leonidas in bravery at Thermopylai, were also honoured in an adjacent sanctuary (Paus. 3.19.9). Back in the agora, the Persian Stoa mentioned above, though much modified over the centuries, continued as a powerful emblem of Spartan triumph. On the acropolis, next to the famed temple of Athena Chalkioikos (of the Bronze House) where he was starved to death at the ephors' command (Thuc. 1.134.2–4), stood two bronze statues of Pausanias, the victor of Plataia, while his later tomb and that of Leonidas himself (Paus. 3.14.1) were situated in the lower city, visible to audiences in the theatre, at least until the permanent scene building was constructed in the second half of the first century AD (Walker and Waywell (2001) 294). At the Leonideia festival, its contests open only to Spartans (Paus. 3.14.1), the Persian Wars were remembered, above all in the competition in funerary orations praising Leonidas, Pausanias, and the other heroes, particularly those at Thermopylai, whose names could be seen inscribed on a nearby *stēlē* (IG V.1 660; Spawforth (2012) 124). Near Lykourgos' altar in the north-west of the city, was the tomb of Eurybiades, the commander of the Spartan fleet at

Artemision and Salamis (Paus. 3.16.6). Unfortunately, the location of Lykourgos' tomb is not revealed by Plutarch in a passage about an omen that occurred upon the return of his remains to Sparta (*Lyc.* 31.3). A site near his altar is far from impossible.

This area in the city's north-east not only provided a mythic framework for ephebic activity but also, rich as it was in allusions to early Spartan history, served as a node of cultural memory more generally. Tradition had assigned Lykourgos, originator of the Spartan discipline, a son called Eukosmos (Good Order), whose grave was of course close to his father's altar (Paus. 3.16.6). On the way to the north-east gate was a *hērōon* to the sixth-century sage Chilon (Paus. 3.16.4; Kourinou (2000) 72–3), whom some considered the founder of Sparta's most powerful office in the Classical period, the ephorate (DL 1.68). Chilon may also have been a motive force for the successful pursuit of hegemony in the Peloponnese through diplomacy (Cartledge (2001) 120), which was commemorated in the agora by the grave containing the bones of Orestes (Paus. 3.11.10) "reclaimed" from Tegea in the mid-sixth century (Hdt 1.67–8). Somewhere in the region of the acropolis also stood a temple of Athena Ophthalmitis, a dedication of Lykourgos to commemorate his loss of an eye in an assault by Alkandros, a young aristocrat who objected to his laws (Paus. 3.18.2; Kourinou (2000) 98–9).

Spartans remembered Lykourgos and Chilon for founding central features of their collective identity: the organs of state, the Spartan discipline, and the city's role as a military power of the first rank in Greece. They also commemorated other beginnings. Memory of the primeval differentiation and naming of the landscape was kept alive through temples, sacred areas, and statues associated with such figures as Iops, who lived before Lakeldaimon received its name (Paus. 3.12.5; Calame (1987)); Kynortas, son of Amyklas, the eponym of Amyklai (Paus. 3.13.1); Eurydike, daughter of Lakeldaimon (Paus. 1.13.8); and Tainaros, son of Poseidon, after whom Cape Tainaron was named (Paus. 3.14.2).

Two *lieux de mémoire* evoked the return of the Heraklids with their Dorian allies. On his itinerary through "another exit" from the agora, either to the north (Kourinou (2000) 141) or to the south (Sanders (2009) 202), Pausanias mentions a house traditionally regarded as that of Krios, a seer at Sparta under the Achaeans before the Dorian conquest (3.13.3–5), which contained a cult of Karneios of the House (Oiketas). This Karneios, whom Pausanias is keen to distinguish from the better-known Dorian divinity Apollo Karneios, was venerated in the city before the arrival of the Heraclids (Sanders (2009) 201) and thus represents the pre-Dorian "Achaean" phase of Spartan history. But Krios, its former owner, was part of the story of the Heraclids through his daughter, who passed information to them on how to capture Sparta. Ever since the Hellenistic period, many historians had considered that the return of the Herakleidae marked the threshold between myth and history (*Diod. Sic.*

4.1.2–3). Thus the house of Krios provides a pivot between the pre-Dorian (mythical) and Dorian (historical) stages in Sparta's development. Inscriptions from the second century AD record the names of two ancestral priestesses and a priest of Karneios of the House (*Boiketās*), who conjointly held the priesthood of Karneios of the Racecourse (*Dromaios*) (IG V.1 497, 589, 608). That a deity from Sparta's Achaeon period had a connection with the ephebic exercise ground is unsurprising, given the strong archaizing tendencies of the *agōgē* at the time. A similar juxtaposition occurred with the hero shrines of Kleodeios, son the Heraklid Hyllos, and the mythical, therefore Achaeon, Oibalos, father of Tyndareus and Hippokoon, whose story, as we have seen, is so bound up with the *agōgē*. Both structures were, Pausanias tells us (3.15.10), not far from the theatre, site of the ephebic *sphaireis* game and, on its east *parodos* wall, of political display by the elite.

While reminiscences of the establishment of Dorian Sparta appear only fleetingly in Pausanias' Spartan itineraries, more prominent are traditions about the extension of Spartan power in Laconia and its conquest of Messenia in the early years of the city, which made Sparta the state controlling the largest land area in mainland Greece and laid the foundations for its later primacy. At the bottom of the Aphetais, in the vicinity of the Hellenion, where a multitude of military memorials clustered, Pausanias saw the sanctuary of Zeus Tropaios (Turner of Armies) (Paus. 3.12.9), built by the Dorians after conquering Amyklai and the other Achaeon communities of Laconia. His use of the ethnic designations "Dorian" and "Achaeon" securely fixes this monument in the city's primordial past and gives an air of objective reality to his narrative about Sparta's gradual extension of power in Laconia under the early kings of the Agiad dynasty (Paus. 3.2.5–6), whatever the historicity of these traditions (Kennell (2010) 31–3). The sanctuary of Zeus Tropaios, whose epithet is the masculine form of *tropaion* (battle trophy), may or may not have contained an object thought to be the very trophy the Dorians erected, but its placement surely conveyed an equivalent meaning. Situated towards the southern limit of the city, near where, we may reasonably suppose, the procession for the Hyakinthia made its way out of the city toward the festival site at the shrine of Apollo Amyklaios (Athen. 4.173–4; Mellink (1943) 17; Kourinou (2000) 415), the sanctuary would surely have reminded participants and spectators of the events that had bound Amyklai to Sparta. Likewise evoking the city's early days, even though unrelated to this particular thread of historical memory, were the graves of the Eurypontid kings located in this district (Paus. 3.12.8).

Teleklos, the Agiad king who according to tradition had subjected Amyklai to Sparta (Paus. 3.2.6) and whose death at Messenian hands on the border with Laconia had supposedly precipitated the First Messenian War, had his *hērōon* near the start of the Aphetais, to the left of the Boöneta (Paus. 3.1.4; Kourinou (2000) 146–7). This building was called "Ox Bought". because it was sold to

the state for oxen by the widow of King Polydoros, another king who figured in the Messenian Wars (Paus. 3.12.3). In the agora, by the grave of Orestes, stood a statue of this king, perhaps visible from the Boöneta (Paus. 3.10.11). By Pausanias' time, Polydoros had become a particularly prominent figure of Spartan tradition. He had evolved from simply being the joint author of the so-called "rider" to the Great Rhetra, as viewed by Aristotle (Plut. *Lyc.* 6.7), into a democratic hero of sorts, "according to Spartan opinion very favourable to the people" (Paus. 3.3.2), whose image appeared on the city's official seal in the second century AD (Paus. 3.10.11) and who in the Hellenistic period had been assigned a key role in the allotment of equal lots of land (*klēroi*) among citizens by adding 3,000 lots to Lykourgos' original 6,000 (Plut. *Lyc.* 8.6; *BNJ* 596 Comm.; see also Figueira, this volume, [Chapter 22](#)). Pausanias' characterization of Polydoros as a fair but humane judge with never a harsh or insulting word for anyone fits his later image, while his murder by a disgruntled young aristocrat recalls the assault on Lykourgos and has been thought to echo the fate of the ill-starred Agis IV, the forerunner of Kleomenes III in attempting reform at Sparta. Third-century reformist propaganda may even have been behind the promotion of the "legend of Polydoros" (Marasco (1978) 125–6).

Polydoros' Eurypontid co-king Theopompos, under whom Sparta won control of Messenia, was commemorated appropriately as well, with a statue in the city's north-east opposite the temple of Lykourgos in a highly charged district near the statue of Eurybiades, commander at Salamis and Artemision. Here, two prominent Spartan military victors were linked with Lykourgos, the emblematic figure of Spartan memory. In addition to his military exploits, Theopompos had joined Polydoros in drafting the "rider" to the Great Rhetra and, according to a tradition earlier than that crediting Chilon, had actually founded the ephorate (Arist. *Pol.* 1313a 26–7). His statue's placement in the vicinity of both Eurybiades' image and the lawgiver Lykourgos' shrine is consequently significant.

Memorials of the Messenian Wars, like most others Pausanias records, were almost certainly not authentic relics from early Archaic Sparta. For the most part, the statues and buildings just mentioned probably dated from the Hellenistic period, or at least the traditions connecting them with the city's legendary history were later creations. This is also the case with the last *lieu de mémoire* for the Messenian Wars, the shrine of Thetis in the region Theomelida, north-west of the theatre, where the graves of the Agiad kings were to be found (Paus. 3.14.3; Kourinou (2000) 93). Pausanias heard from his guides that Leandris, wife of the Agiad king Anaxandros son of Polykrates, had established the cult when she learned that a sacred statue of Thetis was in the possession of a Messenian priestess whom her husband had captured in a raid against the rebellious Messenians. Although a kernel of history about the Second Messenian War may have survived in this tradition

unchanged for eight centuries until Pausanias heard the account, the story is more likely to have been a later invention, particularly since the captured priestess's name, Kleo, is best suited to the Hellenistic period; it is attested only rarely in the fifth century and no earlier (s.v. <http://classics.ox.ac.uk>) (consulted 13 April 2015).

Between the agora and the theatre lay the cenotaph of Brasidas (Paus. 3.14.1), Sparta's most talented general in the last years of the Archidamian War of the 420s. However, Lysander, the victor at Aigospotamoi and for a brief period the most powerful man in the Aegean, received substantially more mementoes, despite his less-than-stellar posthumous reputation (Kennell (1995) 95). A statue of Agias, his seer at the battle, occupied a central location, in the agora by the altar of Augustus (Paus. 3.11.5); the temple of Ammon prompted an account of how Lysander encouraged Spartans "to revere the god even more" after a dream during the siege of Aphyta in Thrace (Paus. 3.18.33; Plut. *Lys.* 20.6); and Lysander's dedication of two Victories was conspicuously set above eagles in the pediment of the west stoa on the acropolis (Paus. 3.17.4).

In addition to these static stimuli scattered throughout the city, memory could be evoked by certain activities, notably rituals and festivals. As we have already seen, the battle at the Platanistas served to bring the battle against the sons of Hippokoon to the minds of spectators and participants alike. In a similar fashion, the Hyakinthia, an ancient festival of lasting prestige, also evoked the distant past and, as is the case with such festivals, effaced the distance between the present and the distant mythical past (Assmann (2011) 37–8) by annually recalling the fate of Apollo's lover Hyakinthos. Still celebrated at the sanctuary of Apollo Amyklaios, the later festival lasted three days, according to the Hellenistic historian Polykrates (*FGrHist* 588). The first day was spent in symbolic mourning for the dead youth. The next was devoted to music, equestrian processions, and dances in the ancient style by Spartan youths. On the last day, young girls tried to outdo one other in the elaborate ornament of their carriages in a colourful procession to Apollo's sanctuary where many sacrifices were made, and all citizens and slaves then dined at the same time. The feast day was so popular that the city emptied from dawn to dusk.

How many of these elements of the festival survived into the Roman period is impossible to determine. On the other hand, Pausanias describes the different sorts of sacrifice offered Apollo and Hyakinthos (3.18.3) and refers to women called "the daughters of Leukippos" (*Leukippidai*), who were charged each year with weaving a robe (*chitōn*) for Apollo at Amyklai, which may have occasioned the parade on the last day of the Hyakinthia (Hupflohner (2000) 67; Richer (2012) 318–19, 361). Spartan women had a lengthy tradition of participating in the festival which is reflected in the only Roman-era inscriptions to mention the festival. On two occasions, the city honoured

women who held the post of *archeîs* and “*theōros*-for-life” of the most revered contest of the Hyakinthia (*IG* V.1 586, 587). *Archeîs* denoted a sort of priestess peculiar to the cult of Apollo Amyklaios, while in this particular case the *theōros* probably held the *agōnothesia*, which entailed administrative and financial duties connected with the contest (Hupfloher (2000) 63–9). The “contest” (*agōn*) itself may have been a formalized version of the competition in decorating carriages Polykrates mentioned or, as is likely in the Roman period (for which there is some earlier evidence: Mellink (1943) 22–3), either an equestrian (*hippikos agōn*) or athletic contest (*gumnikos agōn*). Unfortunately, no extant Spartan inscription records a victor in the Hyakinthia.

The most important festival of Apollo at Sparta was the Gymnopaïdai (Richer (2012) 383–422), when, as later sources relate, nude ephebes and boys (*paides*) performed dances and sang hymns to the god (Paus. 3.11.9; Athen. 24 631 b–c). A chorus of men, attested in the Classical period, no longer appears as an element in the Roman-period festival. Of all the Spartan festivals, only the Gymnopaïdai had a structure built specifically to serve as its venue, the *Choros* (Dancing Place), which can be identified with a raised theatral area supported by a well-built Classical retaining wall situated on the west side of the agora (Kourinou (2000) 114–27). The Gymnopaïdai also had a long tradition associating the festival with Spartan military exploits. Ever since, or soon after, the victory over Argos at Hysiai (ca. 544 BC) that brought the borderland of the Thyreatis back under Spartan control, the dancers had sung commemorative songs and worn special wreaths, once called thyreatic crowns but later simply “feathery” (*psilinoi*) crowns, which were actually made of palm leaves (Sosibios *FGrHist* 595 F5). The tradition continued into the Roman period, as makers of these crowns (*psilinopoioi*) appear in two lists from the first century BC (*IG* V.1 208 1.4; 209 1.24). A later source relates that paeans at the Gymnopaïdai were also sung for the fallen “at Pylaia”, which, if not to be corrected to the phrase “at Thyrea”, would point to an association with Thermopylai (Richer (2012) 409), a battle whose significance for Spartan identity was foundational. In contrast, many at the Gymnopaïdai would also no doubt have recalled the dramatic moment in 371 BC when news of the crushing defeat at Leuktra arrived at Sparta on the last day of the festival, when the men’s chorus had taken its place (Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.16). Performed in an old elevated structure with a panoramic view over the city, over its ancient monuments and southward to the thirteen-metre-high statue of Apollo Amyklaios five kilometres away, the old, traditional dances (Lucian, *On Dance* 12) of the Gymnopaïdai would have embodied Spartan military tradition for spectators and participants alike. The absence of the men’s chorus from a festival so resonant with Spartan tradition shows that, as in the case of the *agōgē*, the city’s youth were considered the most suitable actors to promote and transmit Spartan cultural memory in the Roman period.

Sparta's other major festival for Apollo, the Karneia, whose first victor was reputedly the poet Terpander, was considered to be even older than the Gymnopaïdai (Hellanikos *FGrHist* 4 F85a; Plutarch, *On Music* 9.1134 b–c). The festival consisted of contests in singing and perhaps dancing (Cartledge and Spawforth (2002) 194). At the time of Demetrios of Skepsis, the first half of the second century BC, and probably before, the Karneia was celebrated over nine days in a quasi-military fashion, with nine tent-like structures erected, one for each of the groups of nine men representing the three Spartan fraternities (*phratritiai*) (Athen. 4.141e). The fraternities have been thought to reflect the original three Dorian tribes that conquered Laconia (Ehrenberg 1924, 24–5). If this was the case, then the Karneia would have served to stimulate the collective memory of Dorian Sparta's ultimate origins, a function for the festival that would conform particularly well to Spartans' self-conscious archaism during the Roman period.

Unfortunately, hard evidence for details of the post-Hellenistic Karneia is almost completely confined to a single, non-musical activity, a pursuit of “grape-runners” (*staphylodromoi*). Grape-runners were young adult males wearing wreaths who were pursued and, with any luck, caught for the good of the city, in a form of fertility ritual to promote the grape harvest (*Anec. Graec.* Bekker 1.305). The grape-runners, two of whom appear in now-lost inscriptions from the first and second centuries AD, were drawn from unmarried young men called Karneatai, themselves chosen by lot for a four-year period to oversee the festival (Hesychius s.v. *staphylodromos*). Like the Hyakinthia, the Karneia may also have included an athletic contest, since a victor in the Karneia (*Karneonikēs*) was among those sharing in feasts in honour of the Dioskouroi and Helen in the later first century BC (*IG* V.1 209 l.20). In general, though, like the Hyakinthia and Gymnopaïdai, the Karneia would have stood for the continuity of cult and culture over many centuries and as such represented Spartan cultural memory as it was configured under the Roman Empire.

The monuments and images Pausanias describes, along with the epigraphical evidence, show that local traditions about the Spartan collective past focused on several discernible points, or nodes, of memory. First were beginnings: the articulation and naming of Laconia's topographical features by its aboriginal inhabitants. Next was Herakles' struggle with the Dioskouroi against the Hippokoontidai, which provided justification for Dorian dominance in Laconia and Heraklid rule in Archaic and Classical Sparta. Prominent families in the Roman period who traced their descent from Herakles and the Dioskouroi were doubtless drawing on this mythic tradition to support their positions in the city and the wider region generally (e.g. *IG* V.1 471, 529, 530, and 971). Early Sparta's “conquest” of Laconia permeated the Hyakinthia. Memories then collected around the figure of Lykourgos, the author of every institution and custom which set Spartans apart and whose spirit the citizens

of the Roman city endeavoured to present as continuing to imbue certain aspects of their public life. After him, the conquest of Messenia is the next memory node, since the great expansion of land available for exploitation by Spartans established their city on the path to primacy in Greece.

The advance of Spartan power in the sixth century was represented by Chilon, whose tomb physically associated him with the legendary lawgiver. Chilon's institution of the ephorate would also have been recalled at the Old Office of the Ephors in the agora, where in Pausanias' day dignitaries were honoured with public feasts (Paus. 3.11.11; Kennell (1987)). Nearby was the grave of Epimenides, the Cretan seer who had prophesied Sparta's defeat by the Arkadians in the sixth century, which led to a change in Spartan policy away from open aggression towards their neighbours. Memories of this stage in Spartan history would also have been stimulated in this region of the agora by the sight of the grave containing Orestes' bones, "reclaimed" from Tegea as part of that new Chilonian policy of assertive diplomacy (Hdt. 1.67–8).

The Persian Wars were undoubtedly a major element in Spartan cultural memory. But the monuments Pausanias saw and the ritual activities connected with the Persian Wars tended to focus on persons rather than events. Plataia had the "Freedom" Games (Eleuthereia) (Spawforth (2012) 130–8), but Spartans celebrated the Leonideia, competing in oratory in praise of Leonidas, the regent Pausanias, and the other heroes of the struggle. Tombs of prominent leaders against the Persians were on view throughout the city, as well as the place where the Greeks met to plan their strategy. Individuals also provided the means for recalling the Peloponnesian War, the other event from the fifth century thought worth remembering. A cenotaph commemorated Brasidas' heroic death at Amphipolis, and Lysander's memory was promoted through his dedications on the acropolis, a statue of his prophet, and a temple. The fourth century, far from the most auspicious in the city's history, featured Kyniska, sister of Agesilaos II, the first female victor at the Olympics in the chariot races of 396 and 392 BC, whose *hērōon* was fittingly at the Platanistas (Paus. 3.15.1), and the latest figure from Sparta's history before the Roman period, Euryleonis, another female chariot victor at Olympia in 368 BC, whose statue stood on the acropolis (Paus. 3.17.6).

In addition to the emphasis on the stimulation of memory through individual historical personages, the other bias visible in the Roman city is towards Archaic history until the Persian Wars. The tendency is also manifest in Sparta's image in the Greek East generally under the Empire. The professional orators who entertained the educated public with speeches based on historical themes could find many suitable Spartan subjects from the Archaic period, when all the laws of Lykourgos were faithfully obeyed, or they might honour Spartan leaders in the Persian Wars, such as Leonidas, but despite Sparta's victory over Athens in the Peloponnesian War, the rigorous Panhellenic sentiment that held sway among the Greeks of the Roman period

would not allow a personality like Lysander to be held up as a model of correct behaviour (Kennell (1995) 94–7). In the first century BC Romans began to identify the Parthians, their rivals over control of the Levant, with the Greeks' historical foes the Persians, a process which allowed Rome to assume the role of Hellenism's champion against its deadly eastern enemy (Spawforth (2012) 103–6). As a consequence, Rome's utilization of the ideology that had coalesced around the Persian Wars tradition substantially shaped Spartans' attitudes to this part of their own history and gave them considerable cultural capital to be exploited in their relations with other Greek cities and with the dominant power.

The force of Sparta's image as a city with a particularly close connection to Greece's ancient past is manifested in its attraction for cultivated non-Spartans. Visitors came to witness the ephebic re-enactments of Sparta's incomprehensibly ancient rituals. Others made the greater commitment of becoming *patronomos*, which put them nominally in charge of the *agōgē*; that post probably entailed financial contributions rather than assiduous administration (Kennell (1995) 44–5). In the Roman period, as one of the three most distinguished Greek cities (Dio Chrysostomos, *Or.* 46.6) – the others were Argos and Athens – Sparta was an especially attractive destination for those desirous of affirming their connection with a continuous living tradition from the earliest days of Greek civilization. These individuals, to be considered below, were part of a widespread trend in the second century AD. The Panhellenion, founded in AD 131/2 as the focus of the Imperial cult in old Greece, the Roman province of Achaëa, proved a magnet for those cities eager to identify themselves more closely with the Greece of the pre-Hellenistic past (Spawforth (2012) 351–2) by sending representatives to its meetings and the festival of the Panhellenia. In like manner, the men from cities within and outside the Panhellenion who became *patronomoi* were associating themselves with one of Hellenism's original poles.

The earliest known non-Spartan *patronomos* was the emperor Hadrian in AD 127/8. Later foreign holders of the office came from the highest echelons of the Greek civic elite: C. Claudius Demostratus, a senator from Pergamum and quaestor of Achaëa in the middle of the second century, and A. Claudius Charax of Ephesos, historian and suffect consul for AD 147 (Spawforth and Walker (1986) 92–3). As neither city belonged to the Panhellenion, Demostratus and Charax must have followed their own personal inclinations by holding the patronomate. The motivations of C. Cascellius Aristoteles may have been slightly different, as his home city, Kyrene, was a member with long-established ties with Sparta, something Hadrian had stressed in official communications to the city in the 130s (Kennell (1995) 86–7). Tiberius Claudius Atticus of Athens, headquarters of the Panhellenion, became *patronomos* soon after its founding and had himself passed through the *agōgē* when he lived in Sparta during his father's exile from Athens under Domitian.

His own son, the celebrated sophist Herodes Atticus, who wrote in a style echoing that of the notorious fifth-century Laconizer Kritias, later maintained an extensive estate in northeastern Laconia (Kennell (1995) 86; Cartledge and Spawforth (2002) 113).

The powerfully attractive image that Spartan cultural memory projected drew cities to highlight kinship ties with Sparta, however tenuous, or in their absence to invent them. In Asia Minor, the cities of Kibyra and Selge celebrated their Spartan kinship on coins and city walls. Synnada and Alabanda hedged their bets by proclaiming mythic connections to both Athens and Sparta (Kennell (1995) 84; Jones (1999) 119). Further afield, the historian Josephus in the first century AD kept alive Jewish claims to kinship with the Spartans that may have originated in the late Hellenistic period and were bolstered by a purported exchange of letters supposedly initiated by the Spartan king Areios I (309–364 BC) (*I Macc.* 12.20; *Jos. Ant. Jud.* 12.225; *BNJ* F8a and b Comm.).

A strong case has recently been made for reassessing the part Romans played in the privileging of the Classical past among Greeks of the Eastern Roman Empire (Spawforth 2012). Far from manifesting anti-Imperial sentiment among Rome's subjects, Greek archaism, as it has been called (Kennell (1995) 83–4), was in fact a product of the shaping of Greek attitudes by Roman authorities from Augustus onwards. The Greeks were led to identify themselves with a “true” Greece free of anti-Roman inconveniences such as the resistance shown by the Macedonian kings and the Achaean League in the later third and second centuries BC. Also dangerous were any recollections of the Mithridatic revolt against Rome in 90–85 (App. *Mithr.* 29) in which several prominent states, including Athens, took part. Even the Roman civil wars of the 40s and 30s, in the first of which Spartans chose the losing republican side before cannily allying themselves with Octavian against Brutus and then Antony, might stir subversive passions. Arranging a version of Greek history acceptable to the Romans meant consigning martial and cultural achievements to a distant and unthreatening past.

Thus Augustus constructed and Hadrian strengthened Hellenism's role as a respectable component of Roman identity (Spawforth (2012) 271–2). Sparta especially profited from this process. As early as the second century BC, Spartans and Romans were considered kinsmen (Posid. *FGrHist* 87 F59), and Sparta's martial image naturally accorded with Roman self-perception. Distilled into the *agōgē*, Spartan traditional values might serve as a template for others, as in Hadrian's letter to Kyrene mentioned above. Safely incorporated into Roman culture, the products of Sparta's *agōgē*, like the *ex-pebes* of other cities, could fruitfully use the military skills they had learned in the service of the Empire, and not just to protect their own hinterlands from thieves and brigands (Kennell (2009)). Young Spartans served with the emperor Lucius Verus against the Parthians (AD 161–6) and in the early third

century Spartans joined Caracalla's procession across the East in a contingent called the *lochos* of Laconia and Pitane, an allusion to the Spartan military unit that may (Hdt. 9.53.2) or may not (Thuc. 1.20.3) have fought at Plataia against the Parthians' predecessors.

At Sparta, cultural memory did not crystallize around the traditions of Classical Greece as occurred at Athens and elsewhere. Archaic history provided most of the material for the canon of Spartan memory. Because of the city's turbulent history in the Hellenistic period and its immense significance as "something good to think with" among philosophers, historians, political scientists, and moralists of every sort from the fifth century onwards (Tigerstedt (1965–77)), non-Spartans also shaped this canon significantly. The lengthy period of domination by the Achaean League that ended with the Roman victory in 146 BC and the return of Sparta's battered "ancestral" constitution and way of life (see above) effectively ruptured communal memory of the city's institutions. In order to revitalize the institutional life of the city, later Spartans would probably have supplemented whatever memories their old compatriots had of the Kleomenean system, which survived his fall more or less intact, by consulting some of the many works on Sparta by non-Spartan intellectuals. Foremost among these, I believe, would have been the books on the constitution and Lykourgos by Sphaيروس the Stoic philosopher and ally of Kleomenes III (Kennell (1995) 98–114; *contra* Ducat (2006) 29–34). In any case, we do know that "for a long time" Spartan ephebes assembled at the offices of the ephors for an annual reading of the *Constitution of the Spartiates* by Dikaiarchos of Messene (*Suda*, s.v. Dikaiarchos), a practice that would fit the Roman period well (Kennell (1995) 19). The recitation of a study on their ancient laws, customs, and lifestyles written by a non-Spartan scholar was surely intended to provide a paradigm for young Spartans' behaviour and legitimation for Spartan cultural memory in the form it assumed during the Roman period. An analogous practice exists among the Kwakwaka'wakw First Nation of coastal British Columbia, who prominently display texts by the anthropologist Franz Boas to prove the worth of their culture to the white intellectual world; through them they can moreover assert their aboriginal rights in disputes with Canadian governments (Whitehead (2010)). Similarly, the image, validated by centuries of ancient scholarship, that Spartan cultural memory projected was doubtless a factor in Roman sympathy for the city's interests at the defeat of the Achaean League, while both Sparta and Messenia deployed historical evidence in their boundary dispute of AD 25 (Tac. *Ann.* 4.43).

The canon of Spartan cultural memory developed over time but was essentially the product of the later Hellenistic and Roman periods, when elements of the "Spartan mirage", to which non-Spartans made substantial contributions, were incorporated into expressions of civic identity and cultural practices revived or invented, through which Spartans could live out and

project a particular self-image. So powerful was Sparta's active cultural memory that it effectively collapsed time between the Archaic and Roman periods, inducing visitors (and probably Spartans themselves) to believe that many of the city's institutions and customs really had survived unchanged since the time of Lykourgos.

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PART V

Reception of Sparta in Recent Centuries

CHAPTER 26

The Literary Reception of Sparta in France

Haydn Mason

The effect of the Spartan myth in France shows an unbalanced pattern. It takes till the eighteenth century for its impact to be felt, and it falls away again after the French Revolution, to some extent because the Revolutionary leaders had espoused Spartan ideals, but also in response to a world more heavily based on commercial capitalism.

What exactly is the Spartan myth? Ancient Sparta has left us no document on this subject, and numerous interpretations exist. Paul Cartledge sums it up as having three components: the Spartan polity had been uniquely free from internal disorder; this was due mainly to the omnipresent lawgiver Lykourgos, whose laws had been dutifully obeyed by the Spartan citizens; and these laws were strikingly different from those of other Greek States (2001, 170).

Stephen Hodkinson puts some flesh on these bones. For him, there are four essential strands: the military system, with all male members as soldiers, membership depending upon the compulsory supply of food to the common mess where they dined daily; the economic system, in which each citizen had enough land and helots to meet his personal engagement; the political system, where the citizens in assembly had a formal role in decision-making, while considerable influence remained with the kings and the *gerousia*; the social system of a common, public and rigorously equal way of life (2000, 3–4).

26.1 Pre-Enlightenment

The Middle Ages largely ignored the Graeco-Roman cultures of Antiquity. But with the Renaissance and the discovery of Sparta (mainly through Plutarch), Italy in particular developed an interest, with Machiavelli displaying a considerable amount of reflexion on the Spartan State. This was less marked in France. Jean Bodin (1530–96) paid Sparta attention in *Les six livres de la république*, but only to dismiss the ‘régime mixte’ (with powers shared between the kings and the *gerousia*) as unworkable. Only absolute sovereignty in the hands of the kings made for a viable State; only this form of inequality could protect order in the body politic. The coming of Henri IV to the throne in 1589 and the establishment of a secure kingdom after the

religious wars appeared to be the proof of Bodin's theory of sovereignty.

Michel de Montaigne (1533–92) found Sparta an interesting topic and, influenced by Plutarch and Seneca *inter alios*, he was won over to admiration: 'Montaigne est séduit par cette primauté de l'esprit communautaire' ('Montaigne is seduced by this primacy of the communal spirit').¹ The author of the *Essais* (1580) sees Lykourgos' immutable laws as a protection against arbitrariness and revolutionary disorder, a key value in Montaigne's hatred of revolution. But that said, Lykourgos went too far, since he removed the need for personal autonomy amongst the citizens and allowed too much authority to religion in law-making. In addition, Montaigne is put off by the cruelty inherent in Spartan education, though he approves of its aims. In this mixed picture, however, he awards Sparta the prize for the best regime that has ever existed in European civilization. Both he and Bodin reflect the troubled times in which they lived, in their desire to see the establishment of a stable political order in France.

That stability reappeared under Louis XIV (1643–1715), who from 1661 assumed personal control of the French government. So reference to Sparta becomes yet more irrelevant. While René Descartes (1596–1650) makes a fleeting allusion in his *Discours de la méthode* (1637) to the unity of Sparta decreed by Lykourgos, he shows little interest in what Sparta connoted. Rather more enthusiasm is to be found in Denis Veiras's *Histoire des Sévarambes* (1677), not unexpectedly as the work is a Utopic tale. Inspired by Plutarch's Life of Lykourgos, Veiras describes a régime of total equality ruled by Sevairas, where education is managed by the State, children being taught from seven years of age in schools completely independent of parental control. The State is governed by a monarch on Divine Right principles, which however are not absolute. If there is here an indirect criticism of the Roi-Soleil's rule, it is at most muted, for Veiras insists on the duty of obedience to the lawful authority.

More characteristic of the age is Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet's *Discours sur l'histoire universelle* (1681). Its author, a leading apologist for the Church under the great monarch, would have found little to praise in an egalitarian State. Bossuet does in fact include an appreciative paragraph or two on ancient Greece, but it is punctuated by devastating condescension. The law, he concedes, was totally sovereign; but that is of no concern to present-day interests: 'la Grece ... préférerait les inconvénients de la liberté à ceux de la sujétion légitime, quoiqu'en effet beaucoup moindres' (*Oeuvres complètes*, iv. 247) ('Greece preferred the disadvantages of liberty to those of legitimate government, which in fact were much less serious'). Nor is François de Fénelon, any more than Bossuet, inspired by Sparta, though he pursued a line of moderate opposition to the monarchy. *Les aventures de Télémaque* (1699), which was to remain so popular throughout the eighteenth century, bears few traces of Spartan influence; and in his *Dialogues des morts* (1692) Fénelon's

liberal outlook is shown in his objection to Spartan life. Sokrates, speaking to Alkibiades, expresses strong antipathy to Sparta's treatment of the helots and to her overriding militarism: 'Quelle barbarie que de voir un peuple qui se joue de la vie d'un autre! ... Les Lacédémoniens [...] ne savent que faire du mal' (*Œuvres* xix. 193–4) ('What horrible barbarism, to see a nation make play with the lives of others! The Spartans ... know only how to do evil').

No better instance of attitudes to Sparta under Louis XIV can be found than Pierre Bayle's *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (1697). An omnivorous reader, Bayle intended the Dictionary to be a universal encyclopedia. So Sparta is treated in six different articles. But collectively they demonstrate a wholesale indifference to Spartan ways. Bayle's main concern is not with the political institutions, but only the dangerous consequences for public morality that he sees in the festivals when young men and women mingle together fully naked. His views on the troubled history of the ancient republics are peremptorily summarized as 'une leçon bien capable de désabuser ceux qui s'effarouchent de la seule idée de Monarchie' (article 'Hobbes', remark C) ('a lesson quite capable of disabusing those who are frightened by the very idea of Monarchy').

However, the absolutist ideology which appeared unarguably right at the height of Louis XIV's reign was to undergo great changes as relativist theories of history emerged. Attention shifts from dynastic policies, warfare and international treaties to focus rather on social and intellectual matters. 'Philosophic history' by such as François-Marie Arouet de Voltaire will become the norm. (The very title of Voltaire's world-history, *Essai sur les mœurs*, is itself a manifesto.)

In this new environment, ancient Greece becomes a focus for discussion; and within it Sparta is generally seen as antithetical to Athens. A society based on austerity, equality, a strict system of public education and civic patriotism is set alongside one loving cultural refinement, personal liberty and affluence. Spartan warlike inclinations are contrasted with Athenian 'douceur' ('softness'). The debate on luxury that will develop momentum in the eighteenth century will find in Greek and Roman Antiquity models from which to draw moral and political lessons.

26.2 Rollin and Montesquieu

A vital influence is provided by Charles Rollin (1661–1741), whose *Traité des études* (1726–28) and *Histoire ancienne* (1730–38) achieved an immediate popularity that was to continue into the next century. Despite his fervent Jansenist convictions, Rollin led the way in fostering an interest in Greek history, which had formerly been the province of arcane scholarship. (Grell

(1995) sees Rollin as the ‘référence essentielle’ on Sparta: i. 57–8.) The *Traité* in particular sets out an authoritative study programme for the Université de Paris, reflecting Rollin’s past experience as Rector. Rollin importantly creates an ardent admiration for Lykourgos that will become a dominant theme in other later writings:

Il n’y a peut-être rien dans toute l’histoire profane de plus attesté ni en même temps de plus incroyable que ce qui regarde le gouvernement de Lacédémone, et la discipline que Lycurgue y avait établie ... Il conçut le hardi dessein de réformer en tout le gouvernement de Lacédémone.

(ii. 364)

There is perhaps nothing in secular history better documented or also more incredible than that concerning the government of Sparta and the control of it that Lykourgos had established. He devised the bold plan of completely reforming Spartan government.

Rollin drew up a balance-sheet on Sparta, dividing his reflexions into ‘choses louables’ (‘praiseworthy things’) and ‘choses blâmables’ (‘blameworthy things’). The former include: mixed government, where the law is the ‘unique maîtresse’ (‘the sole sovereign’) rather than the kings; an equal land-sharing (which, after the political institutions, he considers the most important achievement); and the education system. But on the other side of the picture he lists: the ‘barbaric’ custom of exposing weak children to die; the often cruel treatment of the young in the schools; the exclusion of cultural training; the ‘inhumanly’ stoical attitudes of the mothers; and the concentration on military pursuits. Rollin is particularly offended by the lack of modesty in the nudity at festivals, and he attacks Lykourgos’ laws as being related to the ‘ténèbres’ (‘darkness’) and ‘désordres’ (‘disorders’) into which he believes that paganism was plunged. To it he opposes the ‘purity of the laws of the Gospel’ and ‘the dignity and excellence of Christianity’. While the land distribution and the absence of money are admirable in helping to abolish economic inequality, Rollin also points out that Lykourgos, ‘en établissant ces lois, avait les armes à la main’ (‘was armed when creating these laws’). By contrast, Christians had in their thousands sold up their property to follow Christ into poverty (ii. 389). Rollin’s admiration is clearly tempered by his fundamental belief in a quite different mode of living.

What Rollin contributes in information about Sparta paves the way for the reflexions on the nature and significance of Sparta that Charles de Secondat de Montesquieu (1689–1755) will offer in his great work, *De l’esprit des lois* (1748). As the title indicates, the author seeks to discover the laws underlying various forms of government; and he proposes his famous taxonomy, dividing all societies into three types: democracy, monarchy and despotism. In order to illustrate what he means by democracy, he turns to the republics of Antiquity,

motivated by what he calls ‘virtue’, which he interprets as a combination of ardent patriotism and love of equality. Such a State, he believes, had to be small, for otherwise it could not coherently exist (viii. 16); therefore it cannot belong to the modern age. As proof of this, Montesquieu cites, with some irony, a failed experiment: the seventeenth-century English Commonwealth, where the citizens, though lacking antique virtue, had made impotent efforts to set up a democracy (iii. 3).

In this ancient world, Sparta plays an exemplary role, albeit secondary to republican Rome. Like Rollin, Montesquieu is impressed by Lykourgos’ extraordinary qualities, which verge on the incredible: ‘Quand vous voyez, dans la vie de Lycurgue, les lois qu’il donna aux Lacédémoniens, vous croyez lire l’histoire des Sévarambes’ (‘When you look at Lykourgos’ life and the laws which he gave to the Spartans, you think you’re reading the story of the Sevarambes’). He goes on to express admiration for Lykourgos’ political sense in understanding the character of Sparta and also his subsequent ruthlessness in contravening received ideas so as to make that character compatible with the laws:

Lycurgue, mêlant le larcin avec l’esprit de justice, le plus dur esclavage avec l’extrême liberté, les sentiments les plus atroces avec la plus grande modération, donna de la stabilité à sa ville. Il sembla lui ôter toutes les ressources, les arts, le commerce, l’argent, les murailles: on y a de l’ambition, sans espérance d’être mieux: on y a les sentiments naturels, et on n’y est ni enfant, ni mari ni père: la pudeur même est ôtée à la chasteté. C’est par ces chemins que Sparte est menée à la grandeur et à la gloire ...

(iv. 6)

Lykourgos, combining together larceny and a spirit of justice, the harshest slavery and extreme liberty, the most appalling sentiments and the greatest moderation, conferred stability upon his city. He seemed to be depriving her of all her resources, the arts, trade, money, the city-walls; ambition exists but with no prospect of improving one’s lot; natural feelings exist, yet there are no children, husbands, fathers; even modesty is removed from chastity. These were the means whereby Sparta was led to greatness and to glory ...

Though generally favourable to Sparta, Montesquieu does not go so far as to prefer it to Athens. As the title of this work suggests, his purpose is to conduct an enquiry into the ‘spirit of the laws’. How do laws and customs, in their manifold diversity the world over, obey the general rules of both the physical and the social worlds? (Unsurprisingly, he has been termed the first sociologist.) So, in setting down Sparta and Athens side by side, he offers no moral judgment. Instead, their different natures are outlined, and the consequent implications:

Il y avait dans la Grèce deux sortes de républiques: les unes étaient militaires, comme Lacédémone; d'autres étaient commerçantes, comme Athènes. Dans les unes on voulait que les citoyens fussent oisifs; dans les autres on cherchait à donner de l'amour pour le travail.

(v. 6)

In Greece there were two types of republics; some were military, like Sparta; others were commercial, like Athens. In the former, citizens were required to be idle; in the latter, efforts were made to inspire a love of work.

This paradoxical emphasis upon idleness is consistent with Montesquieu's ambivalent approach to a State like Sparta. Here was a society in which inequalities of wealth apparently did not exist and where the love of frugality led to one particular form of happiness, 'le seul bonheur de rendre à sa patrie de plus grands services que les autres citoyens' (v. 3) ('the unique happiness of giving greater service to the motherland than did other citizens'). For himself, he indulges no illusions about this kind of well-being, comparing it with asperity to the monastic life: 'Pourquoi les moines aiment-ils tant leur ordre? C'est justement par l'endroit qui fait qu'il leur est insupportable' (v. 2) ('Why do monks love their order so much? Precisely because of what makes it intolerable to them').

Hence the 'excellence' of such a community depends on the absence of luxury: 'moins il y a de luxe dans une république, plus elle est parfaite' (vii. 2) ('the less luxury there is in a republic, the more perfect it is'). Yet Lykourgos had abolished not only luxury but also the arts, commerce and even private family feelings. Sumptuary laws are essential. Even so, unconditional democracy is doomed to fail sooner or later: 'Les républiques finissent par le luxe' (vii. 4) ('Republics end up with luxury'). Given that they are also necessarily small, Montesquieu's conclusion becomes clear: Sparta has no place in the contemporary world.

In any event, democracies are no more free than aristocracies: 'La liberté politique ne se trouve que dans les gouvernements modérés' ('political liberty is to be found only in moderate governments [i.e., monarchies]'). Although Montesquieu seems to hesitate between the republican ideal and modern England, he eventually decides in favour of the latter. Nevertheless, his wide-ranging survey, alongside Rollin's scholarly account, serves to put Sparta in the forefront of Enlightenment consciousness. The two obliged their readers to confront the wider questions posed by a nascent capitalism. What validity, if any, might one still attach to rank and privilege?

26.3 Mably and Rousseau

With Gabriel Bonnot de Mably (1709–85) we come to Sparta's first whole-hearted supporter: so much so that he is described in the *Année littéraire* (1776, vol. 4) as an 'austère spartiate égaré dans les rues de Paris' ('an austere Spartophile, lost in the streets of Paris'). He apparently demonstrated his enthusiasm visibly by going about the capital wearing the Lykourgan cloak on his shoulders (Galliani, 3.181–9). An apologist for French absolutism in his early works, by 1750 he had become a classical republican, to whom Sparta and early Rome were to act as models. Mably saw Sparta as unique, above all because of Lykourgos' genius. Like Montesquieu, he felt that the lawgiver had intuited the essential nature of the Spartans: 'il descendit, pour ainsi dire, jusque dans le fond du coeur des citoyens' ('he penetrated, so to speak, right into the depths of the citizens' hearts'), and 'forced the Spartans to become wise and happy' (*Oeuvres complètes*, iv. 16, 20). Following on Plutarch's Life of Lykourgos, Mably is convinced that Lykourgos was uniquely responsible for the coherence that existed in Spartan institutions and manners; such could not have come about merely through a succession of reforms. The banning of gold and silver, the use of iron currency and the meals taken in common in public, all these rules helped to found a society that was to remain free from corruption for six hundred years. Money is replaced by freedom, love of country, justice, temperance, frugality (*OC*, ix. 97). Sparta declined only when people had become infected by greed as landowners (*OC*, ix. 118).

Mably envisaged an idyllic existence, free from oppression and want but also from *ennui*, even though the citizens were forbidden to farm the land (which was left to the helots):

Des hommes toujours occupés des exercices de la chasse ... du pugilat, de la lutte, etc., se preparaient dans leurs plaisirs mêmes à devenir d'intrepides défenseurs de la patrie ... Le temps fuyait rapidement pour les Spartiates; et au milieu de cette vie toujours agissante, comment les passions ... auraient-elles trouvé un moment pour tromper, séduire et corrompre un Lacédémonien?

(*Oeuvres complètes*, x. 109)

Men always occupied in hunting ... boxing, wrestling, etc., were being prepared even in their pleasures to become intrepid defenders of the nation ... Time flew by for the Spartans, and amid this ever-active life ... how would the passions have found a moment to deceive, seduce and corrupt a Spartan?

This was the best of all possible worlds. But the chances of ever returning to such a state of prelapsarian innocence appear most unlikely: 'viendra-t-il parmi nous un nouveau Charlemagne? On doit le désirer, mais on ne peut l'espérer' (*Oeuvres posthumes*, iii. 270) ('will another Charlemagne come

amongst us? It is desirable, but one cannot place any hopes on it’).

Mably, however, is not solely consumed by futile nostalgia. This evocation can also serve as a critique on which to base reformist appeals against the status quo, which threatened to decline into despotism in a corrupt age. He felt it might be possible to establish in France a republican framework such as England had known under Cromwell. For England still enjoyed, like Sweden, a form of ‘gouvernement libre’ in which the aristocracy worked harmoniously with an hereditary prince. Whereas the English had the Magna Carta as a ‘compass’, no such fundamental law existed in France, nor any firm constitutional order (*Observations sur l’histoire de France*). In practice the best hope might be a recall of the *Etats-généraux*, the assembly composed of the three *Etats* (clergy, nobility, commoners) which had existed from medieval times up to 1614. They might, he suggests, be assembled every two to three years, and should never be dissolved. For ‘le parlement est le seul corps qui pourrait mettre quelques entraves au pouvoir arbitraire’ (*Œuvres posthumes*, iii. 280) (‘Parliament is the only body that could place some restrictions on arbitrary power’).

As Mably sees it, the supreme aim of politics is a moral one, to ‘faire aimer la vertu’ (‘inculcate a love of virtue’). The full title of one of his most important works makes this clear. *Entretiens de Phocion sur le rapport de la morale avec la politique* (‘Phokion’s Conversations about the relation of Morality to Politics’) (1763). It is the function of the State to exploit Natural Law, according to which reason, virtue and happiness are closely linked. But Lykourgos had shown the citizens that morality was not earned so easily: ‘Il les endurecit au travail, à la peine, à la fatigue’ (v. 96). (‘He hardened them to labour, grief, fatigue’.)

In his opposition to private property, Mably clashed with the Physiocrats, a group of economic thinkers who held that landed wealth was the keystone of the social order, with agriculture as the most effective vehicle of financial growth. So Antiquity had no part in all this, since it had ignored the importance of agricultural principles as the basis of material property. A leading Physiocrat, Pierre-Paul Le Mercier de La Rivière, proposed in *L’ordre naturel et essentiel des sociétés politiques* (1767) that this ‘essential order’ was founded on property rights. Mably responded with a direct refutation, *Doutes proposés à l’Ordre ...* (1768), in which he claimed that Spartans knew no such property rights, since they possessed only the usufruct of the land during their lifetime. Yet ‘hors de l’ordre naturel et essentiel des sociétés ... Sparte a fait de plus grandes choses que les Etats que vous jugez plus sages qu’elle, et a joui d’un bonheur pendant six cents ans’ (*OC* xi. 6–7) (‘outside the natural and essential order of societies ... Sparta did greater things than the States which you consider to be wiser than her, and enjoyed happiness for six hundred years’). Only when property rights were established did Sparta go into decline.

Mably's later years were clouded by pessimism, and at his death he was a forgotten figure (Wright (1997) 6). His hopes of a 'révolution ménagée' ('controlled revolution') on the model of the seventeenth-century Dutch Revolution had come to naught, after the Maupeou coup of 1771 had overthrown (albeit temporarily) the Parlements. But with the recall of the Etats-généraux in 1788, Mably's views became again relevant to the changed times, and his influence as a Spartophile was to remain into the nineteenth century.

Mably has encountered strong criticism from Grell, who sees his antithetic contrasts (virtue/vice; greatness/decadence; happiness/adversity) as simplistic (i. 473). But a different perspective, less exclusively French and setting him in the line of the 'Atlantic republican tradition' which embraces the Netherlands, Cromwellian England and colonial America, suggests a greater solidity to his thinking. From a different viewpoint, he has been seen by Rawson and others as an early Communist. But as Wright shows (1997, 98–102), his objection to property does not cohere with the utopian socialism of such as Jean Meslier and Dom Leger-Marie Deschamps, where the State is predicted to wither away when an authentic society is established.

Mably and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78) were at first on friendly terms, as one might expect from their similar views on Sparta. But in 1764, relations changed when Rousseau heard rumours that Mably was describing his *Lettres écrites de la Montagne* as 'des clameurs d'un démagogue effréné' ('clamourings of a frenetic demagogue'). Things got worse when Rousseau claimed to find in Mably's *Entretiens de Phocion* 'une compilation de mes écrits, faite sans retenue et sans honte' (*Les Confessions*, 735–6) ('a compilation of my writings, put together in an uncontrolled and shameless manner'). Henceforth Rousseau viewed Mably as an enemy. Mably riposted in *Sur la théorie du pouvoir politique*:

Rousseau, que nous avons tous connu, est un grand exemple et peut-être unique, de tout ce que l'imagination peut produire à la fois de bien et de mal [...] Il faut trancher le mot, quoiqu'il me paraisse dur: Rousseau, je le dis pour son bonheur, était fou dans toute la force du terme ... un homme que j'ai connu, que j'ai aimé, qui a eu le malheur d'avoir une raison égarée.

(*Sur la théorie du pouvoir politique*, 271–4)

Rousseau, known to us all, is an example, great and perhaps unique, of what the imagination can produce for good and for evil ... To speak plainly, though that seems harsh: Rousseau, I say it for his own good, was mad in the full meaning of that word ... a man whom I have known, have loved, and who has been unfortunate enough to have a troubled mind.

In fact, broad parallels conceal significant differences in philosophic attitudes. As Wright points out, the concept of 'general will' is absent from Mably, just

as ‘mixed government’ does not figure in Rousseau. Whereas Mably accepted political representation, such a practice is denounced by Rousseau. Furthermore, the more limited vision of Mably makes little use of such concepts as ‘state of Nature’, ‘social contract’ and ‘sovereignty’.

For Rousseau turns the myth of Sparta into a more fundamental debate about the values of an authentic society. Mably’s commentary stops short of articulating a wholly persuasive relationship between ‘man’ and ‘citizen’, while Rousseau was to address this from his very first essay, the *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* (1750). Many others before him had explored the polarity between Athens and Sparta, as also the falsity of social appearances; indeed, the claim that we all wear a mask in society was scarcely new. (To name but one, Jean-Baptiste’s Molière’s *Le Misanthrope* (1666) had shaped his comedy around that self-same theme.) But what made this *Discours* so special was the intensity of the onslaught upon the moral vacuity of contemporary manners. Into this attack, the picture that he paints of Sparta fits neatly, as a signal instance of happy and virtuous ignorance. That said, Sparta is only rarely singled out for specific mention, and republican Rome serves his purpose just as well. In fact, the first example cited of ancient purity is Egypt, ‘cette première école de l’Univers’ (*OC*, iii. 10) (‘that first school of the Universe’); and many other States are also mentioned. However, when Rousseau finally comes to Sparta, the appeal is clarion-like. It is first alluded to in periphrasis, then apostrophized, and finally contrasted with Athens. Space does not permit of a full quotation from this stylistically heightened passage; a few excerpts must suffice:

Oublierais-je que ce fut dans le sein même de la Grèce qu’on vit s’élever cette Cité aussi célèbre par son heureuse ignorance que par la sagesse de ses Lois, cette République de demi-dieux plutôt que d’hommes? Tant leurs vertus semblaient supérieures à l’humanité!

(iii. 12–13)

How could I forget that, at the very heart of Greece, one saw the rise of this city, as renowned for its happy ignorance as for the wisdom of its Laws, this Republic of demigods rather than men? So much did their virtues seem superior to humanity!

Sparta represents for Rousseau the most pure phenomenon of a way of life that once existed but exists no longer. During the quarrel that arose from publication of the *Discours*, he taunts his opponents with this indubitable fact:

L’embarras de mes adversaires est visible toutes les fois qu’il faut parler de Sparte. Que ne donneraient-ils point pour que cette fatale Sparte n’eût jamais existé? ... C’est une terrible chose qu’au milieu de cette fameuse Grèce qui ne devait sa vertu qu’à la philosophie, l’Etat où la vertu a été la

plus pure et a duré le plus longtemps ait été précisément celui où il n'y avait point de philosophes.

(iii. 83)

My opponents are visibly embarrassed every time Sparta is mentioned. What would they not give for this terrible Sparta to have never existed? ... How dreadful that amid this wondrous Greece which owed its virtue solely to philosophy, the State whose virtue was the purest and the most enduring was precisely the one where there were no philosophers.

The triumphalist note is all too clear. Rousseau goes on to point out that in theory Athens should have been the conqueror, since it was larger and wealthier, whereas in fact it was Sparta that won out.

Such is Rousseau's fascination for Sparta that he follows the *Discours* with a *Parallèle entre les deux républiques de Sparte et de Rome*. The two States receive equal praise ('toutes deux brillèrent à la fois par les vertus et par la valeur' (OC, iii. 539; 'both shone alike in virtues and in valour'). But in particular the author insists upon the providential appearance of Lykourgos to hand down to Spartans their sublime institutions. He will go on to undertake an *Histoire de Lacédémone* (remarkable in that it is the only history Rousseau ever attempted), because of 'un penchant presque invincible' born of his admiration for 'des hommes qui ne nous ressemblent en rien' (iii. 544–5) ('an almost unconquerable inclination ... men unlike us in every respect'). Although the *Histoire* peters out, not even getting to Lykourgos, the very effort in an unusual genre testifies to Rousseau's continuing admiration for the possibilities of human endeavour which Sparta had represented.

Thereafter, the ancient city will appear only intermittently as a noble ideal. (Curiously, Sparta does not appear in the Rousseau Correspondence, except in letters written to Rousseau.) The *Discours sur l'inégalité* (often referred to as his second *Discours*) is in many ways a fuller development of the earlier *Discours*, so one might have expected an even greater emphasis on Sparta. But in fact mentions are few, with one important exception; when Rousseau contrasts Lykourgos with other legislators who had merely tinkered with their institutions, while he had 'cleaned out the whole place', before constructing 'a fine building' (iii. 180). If one takes Judith Shklar's view (1996) that Rousseau follows two ideals throughout his career, compatible but distinct: Sparta, and the Golden Age (the 'state of Nature'), then the *Inégalité* clearly belongs to the latter, since the thesis that natural man was expelled from his original Paradise owes far more to the myth of Eden than to Sparta.

A specific aspect of what Rousseau sees as a social falsehood will soon occur. In 1757, Volume VII of the *Encyclopédie* (see later) appeared. It contained the article 'Genève' by Jean d'Alembert, in which the author proposes the establishment of a permanent theatre in the city where once Calvin had held sway. It would, he claimed, bring together the wisdom of Sparta and the

politesse of Athens. Rousseau's hostile reaction was spontaneous. In three weeks he composed an extensive *Lettre à d'Alembert* – written, he says in his Confessions, while 'je versai de délicieuses larmes' (ed., 585) ('I shed delicious tears'). He is opposed to theatre because he sees it as dependent upon a fraudulent relationship between the actors coldly calculating their effect on the audience and the spectators who, in their turn, are observing them in a state of voyeuristic alienation. But he is not against every form of spectacle. In place of conventional drama he advocates open-air amateur entertainments, where all are actors and all spectators, the whole assembly coming together in a spirit of transparent integrity and total equality. This brings him to recall nostalgically 'les jeux et les fêtes de ma jeunesse' in Geneva; and that reminds him of a more ancient archetype:

cette Sparte que je n'aurais jamais assez citée pour l'exemple que nous devrions en tirer; ainsi ... le Spartiate ennuyé soupirait après ses grossiers festins et ses fatigants exercices. C'est à Sparte que dans une laborieuse oisiveté, tout était plaisir et spectacle. C'est là que les rudes travaux passaient pour des récréations, et que les moindres délassements formaient une instruction publique. C'est là que les citoyens continuellement assemblés, consacraient la vie entière à des amusements qui faisaient la grande affaire de l'Etat, et à des jeux dont on ne se délassait qu'à la guerre.

(v. 122)

this Sparta, which I shall never have mentioned often enough for the example that we should draw from it; thus [...] the Spartan when bored would yearn for his coarse feasts and arduous exercises. It was at Sparta that, in the midst of diligent idleness, all was pleasure and spectacle. There rough labours were thought of as recreations, and even the slightest diversions contributed to the public education. There the citizens, being continually called together, devoted their whole lives to entertainments that were the prime concern of the State, and games from which only war distracted them.

Here, in a passage owing direct inspiration to Plutarch's *Life of Lykourgos*, is the portrait of an ideal society in which work and play have achieved a perfect balance. But there can be no hope of resurrecting these *mores*. In one specific area, Rousseau is sure that this would be impossible. The spectacle of naked Spartan girls dancing in public would be too shocking for 'tout peuple qui n'est qu'honnête' ('every nation that is merely honest') (v. 122).²

In 1762 Rousseau's *Contrat social* was published. Here Rousseau offers a remedy for the evils identified in the *Inégalité*, prescribing a basis for legitimate government in an authentic society based on a true 'Contract', where the citizen, enjoying perfect freedom, is nevertheless at one with the General Will, which is sovereign and inalienable. The Legislator for this people will be an 'extraordinary man', fully cognizant of all human passions

while impervious to them himself. The shadow of Lykourgos falls all too clearly across this figure. Sparta plays a key role in the *Contrat*, even though it is secondary to Rome. Their joint influence is fundamental, playing a decisive role in Rousseau's political thought here and elsewhere. As in Sparta quite specifically, money-making is to be avoided: 'Ce mot de finance est un mot d'esclave; il est inconnu dans la Cité' (iii. 429) ('This word "finance" is a slave's word; it is unknown in the City'). Yet it is not, as it tends to be with Mably, a nostalgic evocation. Rousseau inveighs against those who would relegate it, like Veiras's Sévarambes, to 'le pays des chimères... je peignais un objet existant' (iii. 810) ('the land of wild dreams ... I was depicting an object which actually existed'). As the opening paragraph of the *Contrat* indicates, he will consider 'les hommes tels qu'ils sont, et les lois telles qu'elles peuvent être' (iii. 351) ('men as they are, and laws as they can be'). This shows the delicate balance he will tread between reality and principle, which makes the *Contrat* so difficult to interpret.

Yet Rousseau would write important works of political advice on the constitutions of Corsica and Poland, where again Sparta can be seen as a model. In the *Considérations sur le gouvernement de Pologne*, Lykourgos reappears, as the man who imposed an 'iron yoke' but also 'montra sans cesse la patrie dans ses lois, dans ses jeux, dans sa maison, dans ses amours, dans ses festins. Il ne lui laissa pas un instant de relâche' (iii. 957) ('unceasingly displayed the sense of nationhood through its laws, its games, its love affairs, its feasts. He did not allow it a single moment of relaxation'). It is out of this relentless constraint under which citizens were forced into civic morality that there emerged the ardent love of homeland which was always, he remarks, the strongest or rather the only passion of the Spartans, a passion which made them into superior beings (iii. 957). This is the same passion underlying the *Contrat social*, turning men into citizens through devotion to the common cause. By making sentiment an essential element in his thinking, Rousseau may be said to have brought patriotism into political philosophy. Conversely, the land-sharing interests him little; legitimate property (as distinct from illegal possession) is an intrinsic part of the Social Contract.

26.4 The *Encyclopédie*

As might be expected, Sparta finds its way into the *Encyclopédie* (1751–1772), that vast compilation of knowledge under the editorship of Denis Diderot and (until 1759) Jean d'Alembert.

Even more adulatory of Sparta than Mably is the chevalier Louis de Jaucourt (1704–1779), workhorse of the *Encyclopédie* (he is credited with contributing the stupendous number of 17,000 articles to the work), who wrote no fewer than six articles on the city ('Ephore', 'Géronte', 'Lacédémone', 'Lycurgées',

‘Sparte’ and ‘Xénélasie de Lacédémone’). Without Jaucourt’s contribution on ancient Greece, the work might well have been rather slight in that area. A great classical scholar like Mably, Jaucourt was responsible for virtually all the articles devoted to Greek antiquity (other than literature) – which was just as well. Typical of the editors’ indifference towards Greek history, the article ‘Athènes’, which might have been expected to be a major piece, is of cursory length. But the volume containing it had appeared before Jaucourt’s involvement.

While fascinated by every aspect of Greek culture, Jaucourt was fervently attracted to Sparta (‘je déclare ... que je suis tout lacédémonien. Lacédémone me tient lieu de toutes choses’: art. ‘Lacédémone’; ‘I declare that I am totally Spartan; Sparta supplies me with everything’). This is borne out by the space which he gives to the city. The article ‘Lacédémone’ runs to nearly sixteen columns in the original folio edition; yet when, in alphabetical order, he moves on to ‘Sparte’, he allocates a further eight columns to a detailed account of its topography.

Jaucourt shares Rousseau’s belief that the Spartans were unique. They carried within themselves, he felt, ‘des semences de l’exacte droiture et de la véritable intrépidité’: art. ‘Lacédémone’ (‘seeds of perfect integrity and undoubted fearlessness’). His account of Lykourgos’ reforms goes into far greater detail, to my knowledge, than that of any contemporary writer. The lawgiver attains the role of a demigod, bequeathing to his people a legacy that he has charged them to observe ‘jusqu’à mon retour’ (‘until I return’). While the phrase makes literal sense in that he had retired to distant parts, never intending to come back to Sparta, the eschatological overtones of the Second Coming are inescapable.

Jaucourt, exceptionally, contests the case that the Spartans were indifferent to culture, claiming that despite the austerity of their politics, their city contained eminent thinkers and writers and was embellished with statues, paintings and fine furniture. But he merely reports without comment the practice, considered ‘harsh and cruel’ even by Plutarch (Life, 28.4), whereby fathers deliberately debauched helots with drink so as to teach their children a moral lesson about such behaviour. As with most apologists for Sparta, the treatment of the helots is an indefensible embarrassment.

Towards the end of this long account, Jaucourt compares Sparta with Athens, invariably to the advantage of the former (‘cette république célèbre, bien supérieure à celle d’Athènes’; ‘this famous republic, much superior to that of Athens’). Neat antitheses are devised to substantiate this claim; ‘A Athènes on apprenait à bien dire, et à Sparte à bien faire ... Si la morale et la philosophie s’expliquaient à Athènes, elles se pratiquaient à Lacédémone’ (‘In Athens one learned to speak well, in Sparta to act well ... Morality and philosophy may have been expounded in Athens, but in Sparta they were practised’). While Sparta lacked ‘le sel attique’ (‘Attic salt’), its discourse was also without

Athenian ‘satires and raillery’, but characterized instead by ‘une certaine force, une certaine grandeur’.

Nevertheless, Jaucourt nowhere proposes Sparta as a relevant phenomenon. Now forever lost, it can yet be admired as an example of what was once possible for mankind. He does, however, at one point admit to a rare moment of ambivalence: ‘les actions de bravoure des Spartiates passeraient pour folles, si elles n’étaient consacrées par l’admiration de tous les siècles’ (‘the courageous actions of the Spartan would be considered mad, had they not been hallowed by the admiration of every age’). This somewhat unpersuasive criterion permits him to arrive at a final encomium: ‘En lisant leur histoire, notre âme s’élève et semble franchir les limites étroites dans lesquelles la corruption de notre siècle retient nos faibles vertus’ (‘In reading their history, our soul rises up and seems to transcend the narrow limits within which the corruption of our age constricts our feeble virtues’).

But Jaucourt’s passionate eulogy appears to have made little impression on the progress of the debate, even within the *Encyclopédie*. A brief anonymous article, ‘Ilotes’ (‘Helots’) censures Spartans for that aspect of their society which even to their supporters was the weakest link. Jean-François de Saint-Lambert’s ‘Luxe’ makes no mention of the city-state. As the same author probably also wrote ‘Législateur’, where Sparta receives just two mentions and which ignores Lykourgos, it looks like a deliberate insult to the pro-Spartan lobby.

26.5 The *Philosophes*

This stance of Saint-Lambert serves to indicate the heterogeneous nature of the *Encyclopédie*. Whereas Jaucourt, at the heart of the Dictionary, was passionate about Sparta, most of the *philosophes*, a group loosely associated with the Dictionary, were hostile: none more so than Voltaire (1694–1778). In the debate on luxury, which brought in Sparta, Voltaire stood firmly for a way of life that embraced cultural refinement. Influenced by Mandeville’s *Fable of the Bees* (1714) and Melon’s *Essai politique sur le commerce* (1734), Voltaire’s two poems *Le Mondain* (1736) and *Défense du Mondain* (1737) came to be seen as the most effective apologies for the beneficial effects, both social and economic, of wealth. Melon had contrasted ‘la voluptueuse Athenes’ with ‘l’austère Lacédémone’ and found Lykourgos’ sumptuary laws simply revolting. Trade was the key differentiating factor, bringing Athens closer to contemporaneous Amsterdam. Voltaire took the same line: ‘l’argent est fait pour circuler, pour faire éclore tous les arts, pour acheter l’industrie des hommes’ (‘money is made to circulate, to bring to fruition all the arts, to purchase men’s hard labour’).

Hence Voltaire's aggressive stance on Sparta: 'Quel bien Sparte fit-elle à la Grèce? Eut-elle jamais des Démosthènes, des Sophocles? ... Le luxe d'Athènes a fait de grands hommes en tout genre; Sparte a eu quelques capitaines' (*Complete Works*, 36. 326–7). ('What good did Sparta do to Greece? Did she ever have men like Demosthenes, like Sophocles? ... Athenian luxury created great men in every field; Sparta possessed a few captains'). A letter to Catherine II of Russia (D18078, 11 December 1772) shows his irritation with the Spartophiles: 'Je ne sais pourquoi on ose encore parler de Lycurgue et de ses Lacédémoniens, qui n'ont jamais rien fait de grand, qui n'ont laissé aucun monument, qui n'ont point cultivé les arts' ('I do not know why ... people still dare to talk of Lykourgos and his Spartans, who never did anything great, never left behind any monument, did not cultivate the arts'). In short, Spartan government was a complete irrelevance: 'Les pauvres gens qui prétendent qu'on doit se gouverner à Paris comme à Lacédémone ...' (D9023, to J.F. de Bastide, c.1760) ('The pathetic people who claim that we must govern ourselves in Paris as they did in Sparta ...'). Doubtless, some animus against Rousseau as one of those 'pauvres gens' underlies this quite gratuitous sally.

Even an apparent compliment to Lykourgos has to be treated with caution. Voltaire comments that the lawmaker 'en fort peu de temps, éleva les Spartiates au-dessus de l'humanité' (ibid.) ('in a very short space of time, raised the Spartans above humanity'). But one needs to read the whole letter to see that Voltaire is pouring scorn on such unrealistically utopian enterprises and that 'above humanity' denotes an unnatural state of affairs. Natural law dictated true human motivation: 'L'homme est né pour l'action, comme le feu tend en haut et la pierre en bas' (*Lettres philosophiques*, ii. 205–6) ('Mankind was born for action, as fire tends upward and the stone falls to the ground'). The pursuit of happiness grew out of this need for pleasurable activity. It therefore followed that Lykourgos had not understood the basics of human nature. Indeed, did Lykourgos ever exist? The evidence is scanty: 'nous n'avons point les règlements de police de Lacédémone; nous n'en avons d'idée que par quelques lambeaux de Plutarque, qui vivait longtemps après Lyucurgue' (*OC*, xxx. 419) ('we do not have the Spartan laws of governance; we have some notion of them only through a few scraps from Plutarch, who lived long after Lykourgos').

Nor was Denis Diderot (1713–84) more favourably inclined to Sparta, for all his great love of ancient Greece. In his *Encyclopédie* article 'Grecs (philosophie des)', he treats Lykourgos most summarily: 'Il était réservé à [Lycurgue] d'assujettir tout un peuple à une espèce de règle monastique' ('It was his task to subject a whole nation to a sort of monastic rule'). His *Politique des souverains* (1774) ironically ascribes to Frederick II of Prussia, whom he detested, a couple of Spartan reflexions: 'Le seul bon gouvernement ancien est, à mon avis, celui de Lacédémone ... Mes sujets ne seront que des

ilotes sous un nom plus honnête', *OC*, 'Philosophie II', 480; 'The only good government in antiquity, I believe, is that of Sparta ... My subjects will just be helots under a more polite name'). A letter to Catherine II follows along the same lines: 'Lycurgue fit des moines armés; sa législation fut un sublime système d'atrocité' (*Correspondance*, xiv. 82, 13 September 1774) ('Lykourgos created monks bearing arms; his legislation was a sublime system of atrocity'). The closest that Diderot comes to a measured statement on Sparta occurs in a commentary on Claude-Adrien Helvétius's *De l'homme*: 'Je ne blâme point les lois de Lycurgue, je les crois seulement incompatibles avec un grand Etat et avec un Etat commerçant' (*Philosophie II*, 442) ('I do not condemn Lykourgos' laws, I simply consider them incompatible with a large State and a commercial State'). The parallel here with Montesquieu scarcely needs stressing. While Diderot is well aware of the inherent contradictions within modern capitalism, he was convinced that the way to overcome them did not lie in a return to antique republics.

Similarly hostile views are encountered amongst several *philosophes*, Luc de Vauvenargues (1715–47), while accepting the principle of total equality in Sparta, goes on to say, however, that 'rien n'est plus impraticable et plus chimérique' (Guerci, 40n.) ('nothing is more impractical and more fanciful'). Anne-Robert-Jacques de Turgot (1727–81), a leading Physiocrat and sometime *contrôleur-général des finances*, denounces Lykourgos' *esprit de système* because it 'détruit toute idée de propriété, viole les droits de la pudeur, anéantit les plus tendres liaisons de sang' (Guerci, 42) ('destroys every notion of property, violates the rights of modesty, annihilates the most tender blood-relationships'). He poured scorn on the Spartan treatment of the helots. Likewise Paul Henri d'Holbach (1723–89) saw the Spartans as 'des moines armés par un fanatisme politique' (Guerci, 195–9) ('monks armed by political fanaticism'), though he allowed Lykourgos credit for employing public education in his own cause' (Rawson, 258; Guerci, 195–90).

François-Jean de Chastellux (1734–78) wrote his treatise *De la félicité publique* (1772) as a riposte to Mably's *Entretiens de Phocion*, though out of respect for the latter he played down the polemical aspect. His work, so admired by Voltaire that he adorned his own copy with bravos (Voltaire, *Correspondence*, D18067, letter to Chastellux, 7 December 1772), aims to demonstrate the superiority of modern to ancient times, since antiquity lacked the personal basis of contemporary society: family bonds, love and friendship, because everything had belonged to the State: 'Qu'est-ce donc que Sparte? Une armée toujours sous les armes, si ce n'est plutôt qu'un vaste cloître ... les simulacres de guerre, le renoncement absolu aux arts, à l'agriculture, au commerce ... la discipline austère, les macérations, les réfectoires, les cérémonies publiques [...] on se croit dans la forteresse de Spandau' (p. 79: cf. Rosso, 314–15) ('What then is Sparta? An army constantly under arms, if it is not rather a vast monastery ... war-games, a total rejection of the arts,

agriculture and trade [...], severe discipline, self-mortifications, refectories, public ceremonies ... you think you are in the fortress of Spandau'.) Furthermore, the hunting-down of helots, which Chastellux says is a regular exercise, is described in chilling detail (pp. 83–4). Despite a tribute to Lykourgos, the author considers the latter's ideas as fundamentally flawed (pp. 90–2). Chatellux's conclusions are trenchant: Sparta is both pernicious and of no consequence for modern society – any more than all the other Greek States of old.

Helvétius (1715–71) is a refreshing novelty to the embattled ranks of the pro- and anti-Spartans. Although as much a materialist as Diderot and D'Holbach, he developed his conceptions of Sparta to reach different conclusions. All our faculties, in his opinion, are dependent on sensations: 'L'âme [...] se trouvera réduite à la seule faculté de sentir', *Correspondence*, 441, 12 July 1759; 'The soul ... will find itself reduced to the single faculty of feeling.' Human passions supply the essentials for our mode of life, whether it be learning, art, commerce or warfare. Morality was therefore founded uniquely on self-interest – even apparently disinterested love: 'Aimer, c'est avoir besoin', *De l'esprit*, 279 ('To love is to need'). These sensations depend on the basic search for pleasure and the avoidance of pain. All our experiences are founded on that principle, not excluding boredom and curiosity. This reduction of ethics to such egoistical motivations troubled many of Helvétius's friends, most notably Diderot. But Helvétius drew from it a set of deeply humanist convictions, on the premise that education was the key to all social betterment.

These views led Helvétius to a distinctively original position on Sparta. At first sight his praise for Lykourgos may seem conventional:

Ce grand homme, échauffé de la passion de la vertu, sentait que par des harangues, ou des oracles supposés, il pouvait inspirer à ses concitoyens les sentiments dont lui-même était enflammé; que, profitant du premier instant de fureur, il pourrait changer la constitution du gouvernement, et faire dans les mœurs de ce peuple une révolution subite, que, par les voies ordinaires de la prudence, il ne pourrait exécuter que dans une longue suite d'années. Il sentait que les passions sont semblables aux volcans dont l'éruption soudaine change tout à coup le lit d'un fleuve ...

(*De l'esprit*, 247–8)

This great man, fired with the passion for virtue, felt that by harangues or imaginary oracles he could inspire in his fellow-citizens the feelings with which he was himself inflamed; that by exploiting the first passionate moment, he could change the constitution and bring about a sudden revolution in the ways of this nation that would be achievable only over a long period of years by the usual prudent methods. He felt that passions are like volcanoes, whose sudden eruption completely alters the course of a

Mably would have assented to the point of view displayed here. But the language used by Helvétius to depict the seismic power of the passions is quite special. Here is no oppressive lawmaker obliging his nation to pursue a stoical denial of self-interest, but rather a leader who, recognizing that ‘le plaisir est le seul moteur unique et universel des hommes’ (*De l’esprit*, 289), has tapped into that dynamic source.

This approach becomes more explicit when Helvétius refers to those ‘fêtes solennelles’ (‘solemn festivals’) so troubling even to some admirers of Sparta, where ‘les belles et jeunes lacédémoniennes s’avancent demi-nues, en dansant, dans l’assemblée du peuple’ (ibid.) (‘the beautiful young Spartan girls advance, dancing semi-naked amid the assembled public’). Thereby these delectable women turn the young men into heroes, fired by ‘l’assurance de ces faveurs ... Peut-on douter qu’alors ce jeune guerrier ne fût ivre de vertu?’ (ibid.) (‘the assurance of these favours ... Can one doubt that then this young warrior was intoxicated by virtue?’) The author’s provocative reference to ‘vertu’ sufficiently indicates his utilitarian application of moralistic discourse. (As we have seen, Rousseau interpreted this custom in a quite different spirit.)

The treatise *De l’esprit* (1758) proved such a radical challenge to orthodox morality that its author chose not to publish again in his lifetime. The posthumous *De l’homme* (1773) pursues a similar line on Sparta, whose citizens are now seen as being ‘à peu près aussi heureux qu’un peuple peut l’être’ (ii. 95) (‘almost as happy as a people can be’). Helvétius rejects the view, almost a shibboleth among the *philosophes*, that Sparta was some dismal monastery. If ‘on est bien nourri, bien vêtu, à l’abri de l’ennui, toute occupation est également bonne’ (ii. 245) (‘if one is well fed, well clad, free from boredom, every way of life is equally good’).

Yet it had to be faced that this happy state was not definitive. Poverty eventually became unbearable, the ‘clef de l’édifice’ (ii. 247) (‘the keystone to the building’) collapsed, and with it all the laws and customs. In any case, Spartan prosperity had been enjoyed at the expense of the helots, ‘les Nègres de la République’ (ii. 409) (‘the slaves of the Republic’). The citizens were free only at the expense of the rest: ‘la prétendue communauté de biens des Spartiates ne pouvait...opérer chez eux le miracle d’une félicité universelle’ (ibid.) (‘the so-called communal property of the Spartans could not ... achieve for them the miracle of universal felicity’). The pursuit of happiness must, alas!, be carried on by different means, in a vastly different world. Yet Sparta remains for Helvétius a magnificent model of political equality, to challenge the spectre of despotism in the world around him.

26.6 The French Revolution

On the eve of the Revolution the abbé Barthélemy published a formidably erudite work of historical fiction, the *Voyage du jeune Anacharsis en Grèce* (1788), which proved a great success. The work is an unconditional apology for Sparta, a city bent only on peace and justice, and for its great legislator. The huge popularity the book enjoyed is symptomatic of a new mood which was to gather force with the fall of the Bastille. At about the same time appeared a treatise violently attacking Sparta, Cornelius de Pauw's *Recherches philosophiques sur les Grecs*, which sees the city-state as a purely military society, driven by greed and malice. But it was the publication by the abbé Jean-Jacques Barthélemy which took the public accolade; opinion was ready for a sympathetic review of how Sparta could fit the Revolutionary cause.

The Revolutionary years up to Thermidor and the fall of Robespierre witness this wave of enthusiasm in France for Sparta, recalled by such leaders as Louis de Saint-Just and, pre-eminently, Maximilien de Robespierre. At first, as Rosso points out, 'Sparte ne reste qu'un ornement ponctuel' (424) ('Sparta is no more than an isolated ornament'). It is only with the establishment of the Convention and the outbreak of war (1792) that a more radical national mood fully invokes the Lykourgan sense of patriotism, as the Revolutionary leaders seek a new source of legitimate authority; but even then Spartan sentiments are far from universally endorsed. Robespierre derives his admiration for the ancient republic from his more intense attraction to Rousseau as author of the two *Discours* and the *Contrat social*. For him Sparta was, in its glorious period, a democracy, and 'le refuge par excellence de la vertu' (ibid., 437) ('the outstanding refuge of virtue'). So the newly-born French republic must regenerate mankind, as Lykourgos had done. Furthermore, frugality is of its essence and the sole path to happiness, seeing that wealth engenders only corruption. Such was the message preached by Robespierre in the hundreds of political speeches which he tirelessly made during these tumultuous years. In his own words, 'Sparte brille comme un éclair dans des ténèbres immenses' (*Report to the Convention*, 7 May 1794: cf. H. Morel, 308) ('Sparta shines like a lightning-flash amid vast darknesses').

However, Robespierre is by no means an unconditional supporter of Sparta. He views Revolutionary France as superior to every model from Antiquity. Nor does Rousseau's hatred of luxury persuade him, any more than Rousseau himself, to espouse land-sharing. What particularly attracts Robespierre is Lykourgos' enterprise to infuse a new love of nationhood in his nation. As the political tension mounts to its climax, Robespierre is persuaded to equate 'virtue' with 'terror', a far cry indeed from the conventional image of Spartan ideals. But he is impressed, like many before him, by Lykourgos' system of public education. In this his enthusiasm is shared by Saint-Just, who goes further than Robespierre in contemplating the possibility of land-shares. But

by the time of his death in 1794, Saint-Just was moving towards Athenian ideas. In any event, his downfall along with that of Robespierre signals the end of imitating Spartan philosophies in any shape or form; and with the arrival of Napoleon, Sparta becomes a distant memory (cf. Rosso, 490–502). As Victor Hugo put it, ‘Ce siècle avait deux ans! Rome remplaçait Sparte’, (*Les feuilles d’automne*: Rosso, 490). (‘This century was two years old! Rome was replacing Sparta’). This of course was not republican Rome, but the Roman Empire, revered by Napoleon. Sparta ceases to be an ideological football, becoming instead the object of impartial scholarly research.

26.6.1 Post-revolution

The debate over Sparta had been a new form of the Battle between the Ancients and the Moderns, between the defenders of civic patriotism and agrarian ideals on the one side and the upholders of individual liberties and a commercially-based society on the other. After Thermidor, the Spartan ideals had become discredited by their association with blood-letting. (Nazism was to discredit Sparta similarly in post-1945 Germany.) The *coup de grâce* was effectively applied by Benjamin Constant (1767–1830) in a lecture delivered in Paris in 1819 (*De la liberté chez les modernes*).

Constant established the distinction between pro- and anti-Sparta in lucidly simple terms as between two concepts of liberty: popular self-government, and private independence. In this alternative, he argued that any attempt to revive the ancient form of liberty could lead only to political brutality. Spartan patriotism would always risk veering into xenophobia. But Constant also warns against the opposite danger, that, absorbed in the pursuit of our particular interests, we might renounce too easily our share in political power and the absolute necessity of justice. So he calls for a renaissance of the public spirit within liberal principles, steering a course between the loss of civic responsibility and an excess of politicization. For, in this view, limited government and self-government are mutually reinforcing. Constant felt some admiration for Rousseau’s attack on the Ancien Régime, but he also thought that that attack had failed to give a sufficient place to the role of the opposition.

Even so, the idea of Sparta lived on into the nineteenth century, albeit in restricted form, appropriated by Right-Wing and Socialist thinkers alike. Joseph de Maistre (1753–1821), a noted Catholic Royalist, admired the martial vigour of the ancient city. A similar devotion to Church and country informs Maurice Barrès (1862–1923) a century later, with specific attention given in *Un voyage à Sparte* (1905), following on his travels in Greece. Rejecting the admiration for Athenian rationality and justice shown by Ernest Renan (1823–92) in his *Prière sur l’Acropole*, Barrès discovers an

extraordinary national energy in Sparta, born of its eugenic principles, which chimed well with his profoundly nationalist opinions, particularly with regard to his native Lorraine, occupied by Germany after the defeat of 1870. Such views, however, were more common in German literature from the nineteenth century on, culminating in the Nazi regime.

On the Left, Emile de Laveleye (1822–92), an ardent Christian Socialist, admired Spartan land-sharing in his *De la propriété* (1874) amongst other works. This aroused a riposte from Fustel de Coulanges (1822–92) who, in his *Etude sur la propriété à Sparte* (1880), denounced Spartan egalitarianism, maintaining that Lycurgus had inclined less to communist principles than to dictatorial methods (Christesen (2012)).

In the twentieth century, Athens as the exemplar of freedom comes to dominate. One might suitably conclude this survey with Georges Clemenceau (1841–1929), hero of World War I, defender of Alfred Dreyfus and ardent advocate of democratic self-government. Clemenceau saw collectivist thinking as a betrayal of individualism, the negation of the Rights of Man and 1789. The great achievement of Athens was to have developed a clear concept of personal values. A supporter of Sparta in the 1880s, Clemenceau evolved into a fervent advocate of Athens, his views only strengthened by the patriotic defence of France that the World War had nurtured.

Thus the *locus classicus* of the debate on Sparta is the period of conflict in the eighteenth century, as a system of government increasingly wavered and eventually fell. Well before Constant's lecture, Montesquieu had clearly discerned the political change taking place:

Les politiques grecs, qui vivaient dans un gouvernement populaire, ne reconnaissent d'autre force qui pût les soutenir que celle de la vertu. Ceux d'aujourd'hui ne parlent que de manufactures, de commerce, de finances, de richesses et de luxe même.

(iii. 3)

Greek politicians, living under popular government, recognized no other sustaining force than virtue. Today's politicians speak only of manufactures, trade, finance, wealth and even luxury.

The rights of the individual in relation to government were being increasingly debated in the period. Diderot's *Encyclopédie* article 'Autorité politique' is a classic statement on the subject: 'Aucun homme n'a reçu de la nature le droit de commander aux autres. La liberté est un présent du ciel.' ('No man has received from nature the right to command others. Liberty is a gift from heaven.') Yet total equality was not possible in the modern world. Even Jaucourt, fervent admirer of Sparta, had to concede that: 'je connais trop la nécessité des conditions différentes, des grades, des honneurs, des distinctions, des prérogatives, des subordinations, qui doivent régner dans tous

les gouvernements' ('I know only too well the need for different conditions, grades, honours, distinctions, prerogatives, subordinations, which must hold sway in all governments'). But many were appalled by a society based on privilege and consequent social estrangement. Should not all honours be based on purely personal merit? Should concern for the public good not precede all thoughts of gain? Did not the manifold examples of injustice, already intolerable, threaten a decline into tyranny? Were there practical alternatives to a system of Divine Right monarchy? The diverse opinions about Sparta were embedded in this larger discussion, which would reach its conclusion with the fall of the Bastille. An understanding of pagan antiquity was essential to a Christian but increasingly secular society; and of that pagan antiquity Sparta was a vital and prominent part.

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NOTES

¹ Rosso (2005) 142. This is the most complete work on the subject. Rawson (1969) also remains important.

² This remark may appear mystifying, unless one remembers that Rousseau is making a distinction between 'honesty' in the sense of 'decency', such as existed in contemporary Geneva, and the morality of ancient Sparta, which supplemented that ethic with the extra dimension of pro-active 'vertu'.

CHAPTER 27

Reception of Sparta in Germany and German-Speaking Europe

Stefan Rebenich

In the last days of the Second World War, amidst the bloodstained collapse of the Third Reich, a fatally injured ex-sixth-former is brought to an emergency hospital close to the front line. Hastily carried through narrow corridors and crowded halls into the operating theatre, the wounded boy realizes that he is back in his school which only three months before sent him out to die in a futile fight. He recognizes the place from a truncated epigram which he had himself written seven times on the dirty blackboard of the ‘good old Humanist gymnasium’: ‘Traveller, if you come to Spa ...’ (*Wanderer kommst du nach Spa ...*).

The German writer Heinrich Böll (1917–85), who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1972, published this story soon after the foundation of the Federal Republic of Germany (Böll 1950). He echoed the National Socialist use of a famous epitaph attributed to the Greek poet Simonides which glorifies the battle at Thermopylai fought in 480 BC by Leonidas and his brave comrades against the Persian host:

ὦ ξεῖν', ἀγγέλλειν Λακεδαιμονίοις ὅτι τῇδε
κεῖμεθα, τοῖς κείνων ῥήμασι πειθόμενοι.

(Hdt. 7.228)

Foreigner, go tell the Lacedaemonians
that we lie here obedient to their commands.

The Nazi elite had abused Simonides’ words and invoked supposed Spartan ‘virtues’ to drive army corps to their doom. In the last days of the battle of Stalingrad, the *Reichs*-Field Marshal Hermann Göring reminded the troops of the hopeless fight of Leonidas and his 300 comrades, pointed to this heroic example of ‘highest soldiership’ and predicted a new reading of the epitaph: ‘If you come to Germany, tell them you have seen us fighting in Stalingrad, obedient to the law, the law for the security of our people’ (*Kommst Du nach Deutschland, so berichte, du habest uns in Stalingrad kämpfen sehen, wie das Gesetz, das Gesetz für die Sicherheit unseres Volkes, es befohlen hat*) (Watt (1985) 874; Albertz (2006) 296–7).

On 20 April 1945, the cream of the Nazi regime met for the last time in Berlin to commemorate the Führer's birthday. It was a sad celebration in the air-raid shelter underneath the *Reichskanzlei*, since the Red Army was inexorably marching on the capital. Hitler was contemplating retreat to the Alps, but then decided to stay in Berlin. 'A desperate fight will always be remembered as a worthy example', he said to Martin Bormann. 'Just think of Leonidas and his 300 Spartans' (Bormann (1981) 51; Fest (1973) 989).

In the immediate post-war years, Heinrich Böll, in his short story, did not eternalize the heroic self-sacrifice of brave soldiers, but epitomized the interior monologue of a boy with torn-off limbs and a bleeding body. Böll aptly chose the epigram – appropriately broken – as a symbol of a failed political morality and education, which has resulted in the useless destruction of the young. The comfortless fragment crystallized the rejection of classical education by German intellectuals and authors who, after thirteen years of Nazi barbarism and the holocaust, could no longer believe in the force of the humanist school training.

Hardly any other ancient polity has been more admired or rejected in Germany than Sparta. From the revival of classical studies in the Renaissance until present times we can identify antithetic models of perception, which originate in the traditional dichotomy between Athens and Sparta. The latter evokes images and stories completely different from those associated with the Athenian democracy. German writers and artists praised the harsh Spartan education and the austere Spartan way of living, while philosophers and historians were intrigued by the mixed constitution and the class system of society. The conceptualization of Spartan history in general, and the interpretation of the battle at Thermopylai in particular, was determined by contemporary political, aesthetic, anthropological and philosophical ideas and ideologies.

27.1 *Sparta Rediviva*: The Early Modern Period

The recovery of Greek and Latin authors in the Renaissance instigated a new interest in Spartan history. The works of Xenophon, Plato, and Plutarch underpinned the discourse on the ideal state and the best education (Rawson (1969) 130–57). Martin Luther, the German reformer, referred to the toughness of the Spartan 'ironmen' (*homines ferrei*) (*Weimarer Ausgabe, Schriften*, vol. xlv, p. 564). More influential, however, was the emphasis in the context of republicanism on the Spartan ephors, who were understood as a controlling body limiting the kings' power. In particular the Monarchomachs in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, who adopted Calvinist and, later, Lutheran doctrines, integrated the ephors into their theories of tyrannicide and the right of rebellion. The tradition that in Sparta the kings exchanged oaths

with the ephors each month, the kings swearing to rule according to the polity's established laws, the ephors swearing on behalf of the polity to accept the king's outstanding position so long as he observed the laws (cf. Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 15.7), could be interpreted as a contract; whenever a monarch did not abide by the contract, the subjects were allowed to overthrow his government (Nippel (2008) 98–101). In Germany, the Calvinist jurist Johannes Althusius (1563–1638), who was influenced by the Monarchomachs, systematized the diversification of competences between the monarch, the highest representative of the community, and the ephors, the second highest representative. He argued that the right of rebellion and the tyrannicide was institutionalized in the ephorate (cf. Rawson (1969) 166–7).

In the eighteenth century, all over Europe Spartan history was connected with the ideals of liberty, virtue and patriotism. Republican debates about civic participation and political representation relied upon the Spartan model (MacGregor Morris (2004)). English and French literature had a strong impact on the reception of Sparta in early modern Germany. Richard Glover's famous poem on *Leonidas*, composed in 1737, was translated into German four times, and two English editions were published to celebrate the Spartan king for having died for the salvation of his native land. The first German version appeared in Zurich in 1766; the preface was written by the historian and prospective publisher Johann Heinrich Füssli (1745–1832), who had studied with Jean-Jacques Rousseau in Geneva and travelled with Winckelmann through Italy; he was a member of the Zurich youth movement that attacked the moral corruption of the political elite and the commercialization of public life, advocated republican virtues and civil liberty and argued with examples derived from ancient and Swiss history. Füssli used Glover's *Leonidas* to encourage the young to repel oligarchic oppression and to promote the moral and political modernization of state and society (Rawson (1969) 308; MacGregor Morris (2000) 211).

Already two years earlier, in 1764, the Swiss pedagogue Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746–1827), then living in Zurich, had written a play entitled *Agis* about the Hellenistic King Agis IV, who ruled at a time of domestic crisis, tried to reform the state, but failed and was killed by his opponents. For Pestalozzi Agis stood for the Spartan youth, and in restoring the alleged Lykourgan order he wanted to overcome the severe crisis of his city and establish an egalitarian community among the citizens. The tragedy is a masterpiece of radical republican rhetoric written in support of the Zurich youth movement; it impugned the rotten elite, lamented the decline of patriotism, deplored the attrition of civil liberty, and culminated in a fiery vindication of tyrannicide.

In 1745, the German author Johann Christoph Gottsched (1700–1766) composed his play *Agis König zu Sparta* ('Agis, King of Sparta'), which heavily relied upon Plutarch's *Life of Agis*, followed the laws of French

classicism, exemplified the rules by which a perfect playwright should be bound and was meant to serve the purpose of the German stage. In his play, Gottsched encapsulated his criticism of contemporary absolutism; but in contrast to Pestalozzi he did not plead for far-reaching political, economic and social reforms, but propagated the young king's moral superiority, i.e. the idea of a ruler who is legitimized through moral perfection. *Agis* is to be read as a rather traditional and sometimes even tedious work offering moral instruction for rulers and transmitting Gottsched's concept of political ethics.

In the age of Enlightenment, Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–1768) developed the most influential theory of classicism, which advocated the idea that art has a fundamental and moral significance for life itself. He celebrated the *edle Einfalt und stille Größe* ('noble simplicity and solemn grandeur') of Greek works of art and demanded the *Nachahmung* ('imitation') of the Greeks in order to become great oneself. Winckelmann thought that in Sparta, due to the simple and natural way of life, the normative Greek concept of beauty had been unfolded which was the prerequisite for the perfection of Greek art. Although Sparta was described favorably, he gave his highest approval to the Athenian art which emerged after the fall of the tyrants during the rise of democracy.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) and Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805) admired the political virtue and patriotism of the Spartans. But they also criticized the Lykourgan constitution and praised the enlightened citizenship of Athens. In an essay on Lykourgos and Solon, Schiller distanced himself from the Lykourgan order, because it failed to meet the proper end of mankind (*Zweck der Menschheit*). 'Since Lykourgos sacrificed all other qualities to patriotism, the durability of his institutions simply prevented progress and called a halt at immaturity and imperfection' (Rawson (1969) 313). To Schiller we owe the well-known German translation of Simonides' epitaph quoted above (cf. Baumbach (2002)):

*Wanderer, kommst du nach Sparta, verkündige dorten, du habest
Uns hier liegen gesehn, wie das Gesetz es befahl.*

27.2 The Rise of *Altertumswissenschaften*: Sparta in the Nineteenth Century

About 1800, German writers, artists, scholars and philosophers were more interested in Greece than in Rome. The concentration on the Greeks intended to embrace Greek culture in its complexity and Greek character in its totality. In Germany, the reflexion on Greek history disseminated a new understanding

of the notion of *Bildung* ('education') and *Wissenschaft* (academic study, scholarship, science), but also of nation, state, and society. The Neo-Humanist ideology focused on the formation of individuality; education aimed at evolving talents and mastering the world. Under the influence of the French Revolution, ancient Greece became the most exalted historical showcase for reason-based individuality. The concept of a politically active citizen and the model of a developing *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* ('civil society') was based upon an ideal projection of political activity in the Greek city-states. This programme, on the one hand, postulated a non-vocational scholarship and supported the rise of the historical disciplines at German universities, but on the other, it assessed the individual on the basis of cultural abilities, created new strategies of social inclusion and exclusion, and contributed considerably to the homogenization of the German bourgeoisie and to the constitution of a middle-class mentality (Rebenich (2011)).

The new German image of antiquity was characterized by a latent tension between neo-classical aesthetics and enlightening rationalism and wavered between the canonisation of an idealized Greek antiquity and the acceptance of other cultures' independence. The 'classical' German view of antiquity was inspired by Winckelmann, as Goethe's (1749–1832) famous book on 'Winckelmann and his century' (*Winckelmann und sein Jahrhundert*) demonstrated, published in 1805. For the representatives of German classicism (*Weimarer Klassik*) Athens was far preferable to Sparta. In Goethe's *Faust II* Sparta is just the home of Helen, who symbolizes ideal Greek beauty.

Athens and Sparta represented the two eternal poles of human development, i.e. enlightenment and patriotism, as Herder already had emphasized. This polarized classification also characterized Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's (1770–1831) approach, according to whom Athens was superior to Sparta. In Athens – at least in the fifth century BC – democracy, expressing the objective will, guaranteed individual freedom, strong community feeling and the active pursuit of beauty and truth, or in Hegel's words: *freie Individualität* and *Sittlichkeit*. In Sparta, an artificial equality destroyed liberty, while an over-powerful state suffocated civil responsibility and intellectual life. The Spartan character was shaped by inhuman severity, and the Spartan state was best described as a slave ship. In his lectures on the philosophy of history Hegel dedicated only a marginal note to Leonidas and Thermopylai when describing the Persian War as a battle of Asiatic despotism versus Greek culture and individuality (*Sämtliche Werke*, vol. xi, Stuttgart 1928, 335–6).

Hegel's dialectic rendering of the two Greek *poleis* is also to be read as a response to a new understanding of the Spartans proposed by the philosopher Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829) and, above all, by the classicist Karl Otfried Müller (1797–1840). The younger generation of German intellectuals reacted against Weimar classicism. They felt an ever stronger affinity to ancient

Greece and struggled to compensate for the bloody consequences of the French Revolution and the national disintegration of Germany. This tradition of German Romanticism, which later became most influential in political theory and classical scholarship, perceived the Dorian tribe as the most authentic of all the Greeks. Sparta was the paradigm for reconstructing the institutions and customs of the older and purer Hellenic past. Hence the Spartans were converted into the Dorians *par excellence*. In Leonidas' sacrifice Schlegel recognized not a patriotic deed, but a symbol of the Dorian obedience to law. 'Their holy death was the pinnacle of all joy' (*Ihr heiliger Tod war der Gipfel aller Freude*), he exulted (*Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*, vol. i, Paderborn/Munich, Vienna 1979, 42).

Müller adopted for his *Geschichte hellenischer Stämme und Städte* ('History of Hellenic Tribes and Cities') Schlegel's concept of tribes (*Stämme*); part of this never-finished enterprise were two volumes on the Dorians (*Die Dorier*, 1824; 2nd edn 1844; English translation: *The History and Antiquities of the Doric Race*, 2 vols, Oxford 1830). In his most important work Müller wanted to reconstruct the history, the religion, the politics, and the culture of individual Greek peoples. He distinguished the Dorians from the other Greeks and defined Dorian Sparta as a model Greek state, praised the subjection of the individual to the community, and emphasized the conservative orientation of Sparta's institutions. His romantic idealization was successful in the first place because it echoed the new political feelings of his age, and also because he combined mythology and religion, archaeology and geography, philosophy and philology, political and institutional history (Calder and Schlesier, eds (1998)).

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, an aestheticizing enthusiasm for Greek antiquity, rational criticism as already developed by the Enlightenment, the apotheosis of the creative individual and an educational concept borrowed from Neo-Humanism formed the basis for the interpretation of ancient Sparta. A new type of classical studies (*Altertumswissenschaften*) was committed to understanding and explaining the ancient world, and the scope of the material eligible for scrutiny was redefined; no longer was it to be solely a matter of textual evidence, but the totality of Greek and Roman remains was now eligible to be examined by the historical discipline of philology. The first modern, one may say 'critical', history was written by Johann Caspar Friedrich Manso (1760–1826), a Prussian schoolteacher and patriot (*Sparta. Ein Versuch zur Aufklärung der Geschichte und Verfassung dieses Staates* ['Sparta: An attempt to illuminate her History and Constitution'], 3 vols, 1800–1805). The author integrated the enlightened rationalism of the eighteenth century and the political liberalism of the nineteenth; Sparta was meant to be an instructive example for a Prussia fragmented as Greece in antiquity had been. But Manso did not present a harmonizing and idealized image of Sparta. On the one hand, he praised the perfect democracy the

Spartan citizens could enjoy, on the other hand he severely criticized the most appalling despotism the helots had to suffer.

Classical scholarship received an unparalleled impetus in the nineteenth century, which brought about internal differentiation and specialization. Ancient history split from both universal history and classical philology. Archaeology was founded as an independent discipline. The first systematic archaeological campaigns and an intensified *Quellenforschung* gradually transformed the picture of Sparta. A long series of 'Histories of Greece' tried to reintegrate the fragments generated by ever more specialized academic research. The historical narratives were based upon detailed source criticism and hermeneutic understanding (Rebenich (2010)).

There were, of course, different shades and emphases. Most German historians defended a pro-Athenian perspective and were hostile to Sparta, as Barthold Georg Niebuhr (1776–1831) in his *Lectures on Ancient History*. Rather influential was the *History of Greece* (1846–1856) in twelve volumes by the London ex-banker George Grote (1794–1871), which was soon translated into German (1850–59). 'Under Grote's archonship a new era started' in German-speaking Europe, since 'all [...] studies on Greek history of the last fifty years of the nineteenth century are either for or against Grote' (Momigliano (1955) 225). In accordance with Perikles' funeral oration, which Thucydides, the greatest of Greek historians, reported, the most liberal of Victorian historians praised Athens and argued that the troubles of Athens originated not in too much democracy but in too little. Grote showed little sympathy for Sparta, criticized the educational system and the suppression of individual freedom, and questioned the equal division of land and property. Grote's anti-Laconian scepticism had a strong impact on the German perception of the ancient polity (Cartledge (2014)).

Ernst Curtius (1814–1896), a pupil of K.O. Müller's who later became Professor of Classical Archaeology at Berlin, wrote a somewhat rhetorical *History of Greece* (*Griechische Geschichte*, 3 vols, 1857–1861; 6th edn, 1887–1889), which was very popular among general readers in the nineteenth century while establishing a close relationship between classical Greece and contemporary Germany. Although Curtius formulated a moderate criticism of the Athenian democracy, he revered Perikles and the Athenian culture of the fifth century BC. The Spartan constitution, on the other hand, reflected the outstanding prudence of Lykourgos, but the military character of Spartan life caused narrow-mindedness, stiffness and rigidity, so that the city-state was not able to unify Greece in the fourth century. For Curtius, Sparta could only take without giving anything. She knew perfectly how to suppress free states with brute force and establish oligarchic governments. But Leonidas and his fighters were transformed into the embodiment of self-sacrificing courage; their tomb was, according to Curtius, 'an everlasting monument of heroic civic virtue' (*Griechische Geschichte*, vol. ii, 5th edn, 70f.). The historian

exemplifies the reinterpretation of Thermopylai in the context of nationalism. Already in 1812, the poet Theodor Körner had praised the 'bloody valley of Thermopylai' (*das blut'ge Tal der Thermopylen*) to encourage his compatriots in their fight against Napoleon.

While Georg Busolt (1850–1920), in his erudite but unexciting *History of Greece* (*Griechische Geschichte*, 4 vols, 1885–1904), used contemporary political terminology to describe Athens as 'liberal' and Sparta as 'conservative', Karl Julius Beloch (1854–1929), an ardent nonconformist and *bête noire* of the academic establishment (Polverini, ed. (1990)), disliked the *polis* on the Eurotas and deconstructed many certainties of classical scholarship. Lykourgos never lived, Beloch argued, and the Great Rhetra was a later invention. He also made a clean sweep of the legend of Thermopylai. His de-mystification resulted in the conclusion: 'The catastrophe at Thermopylai had only one advantage for the Greek cause: it liberated the Greek armed forces from an incompetent commander' (*Griechische Geschichte*, vol. ii, 2nd edn, 104f.). Most of Beloch's colleagues were indignant. Eduard Meyer (1855–1930), for example, who since 1902 had held the Chair of Ancient History at Berlin, refused any serious discussion of Beloch's position. Instead, he celebrated *ex cathedra* Leonidas' heroic death, which was 'a shining example showing the nation the way it had to go; this example made men realize more deeply and more vividly than any words that the only choice was to gain victory or to die with honour' (*Geschichte des Altertums*, vol. iv.1, 3rd edn, 1939, 361).

The crisis that spread through the various fields of classical studies at the end of the nineteenth century had an effect on the perception of Sparta. Critical voices denounced classical studies that in their eyes only produced pale imitation and were in danger of fragmentation. Jacob Burckhardt (1818–1897) and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) discussed the question of the correlation between historical research and living reality. They criticized the legitimacy of a classical discipline that saw its purpose in scholarly productivity and undermined the normative function of antiquity. Both advocated new approaches to the ancient world, which strongly influenced later perceptions of Greek and Roman history. Although they emphasized positive elements of Sparta, they did not admire its polity. Jacob Burckhardt, in his *Griechische Kulturgeschichte* (1898–1902), described Sparta as a nearly perfect Greek *polis*, admired the ephorate and extolled the homogeneity of the leading aristocratic class, but was full of distaste for the educational system and its inherent brutality, denounced the concurrent oppression and exploitation of *perioikoi* and helots and accused the Spartans of blind egoism in the Persian War. They had deliberately sacrificed Leonidas so that Sparta could retain her honour and protect the main force of her army from being defeated. Nietzsche, following K.O. Müller, idealized the Dorian conditioning of Sparta, but he distanced himself from cruel features of society and the harsh

education.

New theoretical approaches were developed in leftist philosophy, where a sociocritical reading of antiquity was postulated. Marxist and socialist authors were fascinated by the egalitarian community in Sparta and discussed the form of property in the Dorian state and the organization of public life. Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) discussed ancient Sparta in his treatise *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884), as did the Marxist politician August Bebel (1840–1913), one of the founders of the Social Democratic Party in Germany. The latter also noted that ‘the free condition of women under the mother-right promoted her beauty, raised her pride, her dignity and her self-reliance’ (*Women Under Socialism*, New York 1904, 42). Any such attempts at politicizing ancient Sparta were ardently rebutted by the conservative historian Robert von Pöhlmann (1852–1914), who, in his *History of Ancient Communism and Socialism* (*Geschichte des antiken Kommunismus und Sozialismus*, 2 vols, 1893–1901) introduced a modern terminology into the writing of ancient history, but tried to prove that there is no evidence whatsoever for communist ideas in ancient Greece. Although he detested social reforms and economic equality, he closely analysed the ‘social revolution’ of the Hellenistic kings Agis and Cleomenes, whom he stigmatized as naïve romantics who had failed because they ignored the harsh limits of reality.

27.3 The Hellas of the German People: The Image of Sparta from 1900 to 1933

The First World War intensified the crisis of classical studies. The military failure of the German *Kaiserreich* and the democratic revolution in November 1918 had deep consequences for the subsequent political, social and intellectual development of Germany. The old system had collapsed, a new one was to be built up. In this time of transformation, historians and classicists categorically demanded a prominent position for their subjects as leading disciplines (*Leitdisziplinen*) to give guidance and orientation to the masses. The majority of university teachers did not identify with the Weimar Republic but advocated an anti-parliamentary, autocratic system and glorified the Empire.

At the same time, a large number of new approaches attempted to overcome the ethical relativism that was associated with classical and historical studies (Flashar (1995)). The various disciplines were forced to confront the urgent question of how to bridge the gap between *Wissenschaft* and life. The majority of the concepts developed under this leitmotif shared a desire to re-establish antiquity as a meaningful historical epoch but rejected a return to

traditional scholarship. Classical philologists remembered Friedrich Nietzsche's 'philology of the future' and defended him against Wilamowitz' verdict. Adepts of the Stefan George circle searched for 'inner form' and 'spiritual' substance. Historical understanding of individuality and the 'spirit' was demanded in various studies. The criticism levelled against the supposed degeneration of scholarship and against the cult of individualistic subjectivity increased in the 1920s and 1930s. A deep-rooted sense of crisis, the rivalry between the prevailing scientific and political, anti-democratic and anti-parliamentarian ideologies and the declining significance of antiquity caused some scholars to absorb nationalistic and even National Socialist ideas in their search for a new image of antiquity.

The majority of German philhellenes of the nineteenth century had admired Athens: six years after the proclamation of the German Empire (*Kaiserreich*), in 1877, Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1848–1931) exalted the glory of the Athenian empire ('Von des Attischen Reiches Herrlichkeit', in *Reden und Vorträge*, Berlin 1901, 27–64), derided the intellectual culture in Sparta and denied any affinity between the Dorian and the German people. After the First World War, Sparta was rediscovered and became one of the most popular paradigms of classical antiquity, not only among professional historians. Political opposition against the democratic system of the Weimar Republic focused on the moral nobility and racial superiority of the aristocratic society of Sparta. The Athenian democracy, the cultural and intellectual centre of the enlightened Ionians, was obsolete. Instead Sparta was integrated into different models of a utopian state which were based upon anti-modernism, anti-parliamentarism and Social Darwinism. All these models shared the impetus to articulate a political and cultural critique of the present.

In the German Youth Movement (*Jugendbewegung*), the leader of which had returned disillusioned from the war, Nietzsche was read, archaic Greece rediscovered and heroic Spartan life revered. Some groups and associations yearned for the resurrection of German youth in the spirit of Dorian youth and idealized a competitive male community which practised eugenic selection and pederastic sexuality. The Hellas of the German people was sought under the olive trees of Sparta (Cancik (2001) 121). Many believed that in historical Sparta, that object of yearning, harmoniously educated Spartiates were characterized not just by physical prowess, but also by highest racial and moral standards. Spartan homosexuality, anti-feminism, and heroism were also topics German authors dealt with. They turned to Sparta as an example of Dorian manhood and elitism. Here Theodor Däubler's (1876–1934) essay on Sparta, written in 1923, should be mentioned, which praised the fictitious homoerotic couples killed at Thermopylai for the sake of their country. Some years earlier, Erich Bethe (1863–1940), in his controversial article on Doric pederasty ('Die dorische Knabenliebe – ihre Ethik und Ideale', *Rheinisches Museum* 62 (1907) 438–475) had introduced this topic into scholarly

discourse and struggled to overcome grand simplifications such as that of Karl Otfried Müller. The latter had suggested that the Dorians, in early times, considered an intimate friendship between males as necessary for their education, whereas *Knabenschänderei* ('pederasty') was an un-Hellenic habit introduced from Lydia (*Die Dorier*, vol. ii, 1824, 296).

Gottfried Benn (1886–1956), a doctor of medicine and an influential poet, claimed lyrically in his essay on the 'The World of the Dorians. An Investigation of the Relationship between Art and Power' (*Die Dorische Welt. Eine Untersuchung über die Beziehung von Kunst und Macht*), that the Dorian's 'dream is reproduction and ever-lasting youth, equality with the gods, strong will, strongest aristocratic belief in the race, care for the entire tribe', and 'Doric is pederasty [...], Doric is love of fighting, such couples stood like a wall and fell' (*Das Hauptwerk*, vol. ii, 1980, 151). Benn's essay adopted categories of Nietzsche and Burckhardt and propagated a twisted image of Sparta, saluting Apollo as a quasi-Fascist god and Sparta as the prototype of the new National Socialist community.

But it was not only poets who adored the *Soldatenstaat* ('soldier's state') and the *Männerlager* ('men's camp') on the Eurotas. Sparta seems to have been a model for a whole generation of academics who were shaped by the terrible experience of the trenches in the First World War and could not accept the military defeat of Germany. At the same time, the battle at Thermopylai and the famous epigram were integrated in the political cult of the dead (Albertz (2006) 277–92). The German War Graves Commission (*Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge*), founded in 1919, transformed the historical event into a ubiquitous example of patriotism. The slogan 'obedient to the orders' reflected the code of honour of common soldiers and classically-trained officers, who were ready to die for the sake of their fatherland. On numerous cemeteries commemorating the dead of the First World War Simonides' saying, in the original Greek and in German translation, gave sense to the doom of thousands and thousands of German soldiers. But the Spartan heroism of the perished regiments was for males only. It glorified the perfection of man's existence in fighting and dying.

At German and Austrian schools, too, the brave Spartan fighters were present. In the *Bundesgymnasium Feldkirch* in the western Austrian state of Vorarlberg, seventy-two alumni and two schoolteachers, who were all killed in the First World War, were remembered on a stone tablet which was dedicated in 1922 and stressed the obedience of the Spartan soldiers who died at Thermopylai (see [Figures 27.1a and 27.1b](#)). The Greek epigram of Simonides was engraved underneath two figures. The stony scenery depicted a wanderer with pole and bag who listens to the message of the dying Spartan. The expiring soldier lies on the ground, holding his sword in his right fist, while, with his left hand, he seems to point to his dead fellow-combatants. At the inauguration ceremony the director of the gymnasium drew attention to the

ancient hero serving as a paragon of patriotism and dutifulness.

(a)



(b)



Figures 27.1a and 27.1b Memorial to the dead of the First World War, with Simonides' lines commemorating the Spartan dead of Thermopylai.

Courtesy of Gymnasium Feldkirch, Rebberggasse (Austria); photo Hans-Peter Schuler.

In scholarship, however, the discourse about Sparta in the 1920s and 1930s was mainly influenced by the accounts of two ancient historians, namely Victor Ehrenberg (1891–1976) and Helmut Berve (1896–1979). Ehrenberg, a liberal Jew, had studied classics at the universities of Göttingen and Berlin. In his research, he combined traditional *Quellenforschung* and historical interpretations with new methods and approaches. Already as a young scholar he tried to synthesize political history and the history of ideas. He was influenced by his teachers Eduard Meyer and Wilhelm Weber, and by Jacob Burckhardt and Max Weber. Like so many other German classicists of the time, he was attracted by the male community of the Spartan citizens. In 1925 Ehrenberg published his book on Sparta, *Neugründer des Staates*, in which he developed the famous theory of a single Spartan legislator who in the 6th century BC refounded the *polis* on the Eurotas and, at the same time, attributed his legislative reforms to the statesman Lykourgos. He also wrote the historical part of the Pauly-Wissowa article on Sparta. There one could read: ‘The one-sidedness of this race indicates its greatness. Never again has the ideal of disciplined manhood been set down in such purity. But the greatest achievement is that this masculine and soldierly society devotes itself to unrestricted service of the Nomos [“law, custom”], which as incarnation of their state, their religious belief, their customs and tradition is their only sovereign. Only thus was this society able to sacrifice almost entirely its individual existence to the state’ (P-W iii.A.1, 1929, p. 1383).

After the National Socialists came to power in Germany in 1933, Ehrenberg, Professor of Ancient History at the German University in Prague since 1929, felt their impact on the social and intellectual life of Czechoslovakia. His family suffered from the effects of antisemitism, and it eventually became impossible for him to go on teaching at the university. In 1939 he decided to emigrate to England. In the same year, in a radio talk in Prague, Ehrenberg sang the palinode of his colourful picture of a 'totalitarian' state in antiquity and warned the audience about contemporary representatives of totalitarianism, who used Sparta as a model for their own inhuman policy (cf. 'A Totalitarian State', in id., *Aspects of the Ancient World*, Oxford 1946, 94–104).

Ehrenberg's famous theory of a single Spartan legislator met the immediate disapproval of Helmut Berve, who held the Chair of Ancient History at the University of Leipzig from 1927. He declared: 'The strange *kosmos* and the Spartan spirit [...] were not made, but grew from the ultimate, timeless depths of a collective soul (*Volksseele*) [...]' (*Gnomon* 1 (1925) 311). Berve formulated his concept of Sparta in the twenties and popularized it in his *Greek History* (*Griechische Geschichte*), the first volume of which appeared in 1931. The brilliant and innovative historian successfully introduced the concept of the history of peoples (*Volksgeschichte*) into the historiography of the Greek world. At the same time, Berve's view of Sparta depended on the idealizing tradition which derived from Schlegel and Müller and thus advocated a strict dichotomy between Dorians and Ionians. The battle at Thermopylai was the culmination of Doric identity: 'The Spartans ... sacrificed themselves deliberately, not only out of strategic necessity but for the law of Dorian manhood. With good reason they are considered as the true fighters at Thermopylai. They were the ones in whom autonomous Greek man consciously opposed fate, they were prepared to be defeated but were not prepared to submit themselves to their fate' (*Griechische Geschichte*, vol. i, Freiburg im Breisgau 1931, 248–9).

Many others besides Berve were influenced by Karl Otfried Müller's book on *Die Dorier*. In the 1930s, the subject made a comeback and was now connected to the racial concept advocated by the Nazis (Losemann (1998) 333–8). The classicist Werner Jaeger (1888–1961), who developed a programme of 'Third Humanism' (*Dritter Humanismus*) to preserve the traditional humanistic *Gymnasium*, advocated the Spartan educational system, which was controlled by the state, praised the 'ethical greatness of the Dorian people' and pointed to the sharp distinction between 'the nature of the Dorians and the Ionians concerning the character of their states' public life and the spiritual physiognomy of the polis'. He explained that the poet Pindar, who was not a Dorian, represented the archetype 'of the Hellenic aristocracy of race' and that 'the Dorian race gave Pindar his ideal of the blond high-racial type of man' (*Paideia. Die Formung des griechischen Menschen*, vol. i,

Berlin 1934, 115f. 118. 271).

One may add that, in the English version of the book which was published after the author's emigration to the United States in 1936, some observations have been differently translated: for instance, *das Ideal des blonden hochrassigen Menschentypus* ('the ideal of the blond, ethnically-superior, human type'), which the Dorian race suggested to Pindar, was altered into the 'ideal of the fair-haired warrior of proud descent' (*Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, vol. i, Oxford 1939, 81). Jaeger's concept of παιδεία and his *Third Humanism* 'served – in the short run – German philhellenism less by politicizing classical studies than by dehistoricizing the Greeks' (Marchand (1996) 329) and reflected the aristocratic creed of an elitist scholar, which glorified Sparta as an Aryan-Nordic warrior state and matched Nazi ideology (von See (2003) 84–8).

27.4 Adolf Hitler's Sparta: The Dorian Polity in National Socialist Germany

National Socialism provides the most striking examples of political promotion and exploitation of the supposedly Spartan way of life. The ancient city was now thought to form an important paradigm for the individual and collective existence of Germans in the future. So it is hardly surprising that already in the 1930s British intellectuals noted analogies between Sparta and Nazi Germany (Hodkinson (2010)). Between the North Sea and the Alps, the Dorian polity was transformed into a utopian model for racist and eugenic projects and for 'blood and soil' programmes (D'Onofrio (2007)). Politicians and scholars applauded an effective militarism, the disciplinarian educational system and the subordination of the individual to the state. As major symbol of Spartan 'virtues' the myth of Leonidas was exploited in National Socialist Germany. The city state on the Eurotas was integrated into the concept of Nordic world history (*Nordische Weltgeschichte*) and a pseudo-scientific biologicistic approach propagated close racial relations between *Deutschtum* and *Hellentum* (Losemann (2012)).

Adolf Hitler approved of Sparta (Näf (1986) 117). His admiration is evident in his written work, but also in some of his public speeches. While spelling *Spartiates* as '*Spartjaken*', he was fascinated with Spartan birth policy, since 'the exposure of sick, weak and deformed children, i.e. their eradication, was the best example of the racial policy in the earliest racially pure state' (G.L. Weinberg, ed., *Hitlers Zweites Buch. Ein Dokument aus dem Jahr 1928*, Stuttgart 1961, 56). In Sparta, Hitler found the prototype of a society that executed eugenic selection, the military education of the young generation, the ideal of preserving a small ruling warrior class of best racial quality, and

the readiness to sacrifice oneself for the sake of the country (Christ (1986) 51; Demandt (2002) 293). In the Second World War the Führer observed that 6000 Spartan families, i.e. a small aristocratic elite, dominated 340,000 slaves; Germany corresponded to the Sparta of the Spartiates, while the helots were foreign peoples who should be enslaved. Thus ancient Sparta, 'the purest racial state of history', became an example for the future structure in eastern Europe (Losemann (2007a) 449–50).

Although the Nazi leadership propagated rather disparate attitudes towards history, Hitler's main conviction was never disputed: that the key to world history was the racial question. The *Reichsbauernführer* (Imperial Farmers' Leader) and Minister of Agriculture, Richard Walther Darré (1895–1953), saw Sparta as a model for the new state, as he had explained in his book *Das Bauerntum als Lebensquell der Nordischen Rasse* ('The Peasantry as the Life-Source of the Nordic Race'), published in 1929 (Losemann (2017) 175–212). Darré proposed the idea that Sparta was not a state of warriors but rather one of farmers. He thought that the decline of Sparta was not caused by military defeats so much as by the abandonment of Nordic laws which had guaranteed that the Spartans were tenants of inalienable and indivisible state-owned lots. Economic deterioration started at the moment when individual Spartans were allowed to acquire more than one lot and became large landholders. The process resulted in biological disintegration, since with the concentration of land the number of births declined, and the decreasing number of children made 'health-bringing selection' impossible (Hodkinson (2000) 14; Losemann (2007b) 310–1). Darré's views on Spartan land tenure strongly influenced the Nazi *Reichserbhofgesetz* (Imperial Law of Hereditary Entailment), which, in 1933, introduced state control over peasant farms, interdicted sale, and established single-heir inheritance (D'Onofrio (1997); Losemann (2005)).

Richard Walther Darré's blood and soil mysticism, and his interpretation of Sparta as an ideal peasant society (*Bauernstaat*) not only corresponded to the ideology of some members of the Nazi elite, but influenced an academically trained public. In 1937, Hans Lüdemann, a member of Darré's staff in the Ministry of Agriculture, wrote a book on the peasant state entitled *Sparta. Lebensordnung und Schicksal* ('Sparta: Way of Life and Fate'), and in the following years a whole range of monographs discussed ancient Sparta referring to Darré's theories (Losemann (2007a) 453). But scholarly discourse about Sparta was shaped by Helmut Berve. Although some Nazi bureaucrats had personal reservations about Berve's political loyalty, he identified himself entirely with the 'national revolution' of 1933 and strongly influenced the academic development and profile of his discipline in the Third Reich (Losemann (1977); Rebenich (2001)). He became first Dean (1933–5), then *Prorector* (1936–9) and finally *rector magnificus* (1940–3) at the university of Leipzig and was appointed *Kriegsbeauftragter der deutschen Altertumswissenschaft* (War Representative of German Classics). But the

historian, who had warmly welcomed the National Socialist re-evaluation of history, did not hesitate to criticize the eccentric concepts of Darré's lesser followers and other ignorant zealots (cf. *Gnomon* 17, 1941, 1–11). At the same time he, like Fritz Schachermeyr, Hans Oppermann, Joseph Vogt and others, adopted racist categories, developed by Hans F.K. Günther (1891–1968), the notorious *Rasse-Günther*, to interpret ancient history (cf. H.F.K. Günther, *Rassengeschichte des hellenischen und römischen Volkes*, Munich 1929).

In his little book on Sparta, which was aimed at a general audience, published in 1937, reprinted in 1944 and in 1966 (H. Berve, *Gestaltende Kräfte der Antike*, Munich 1966, 58–207), Berve depicted Sparta as an ideal historical model for National Socialist government. He conjured up the Nordic spirit embodied in the aristocracy of Sparta and idealized the institutions and customs of the Dorian *polis*, above all the racial laws which were consequently applied, and the elitist tribalism which efficiently suppressed every individualistic notion. Consequently, he eulogized the heroism of the 300 Spartiates who were killed at Thermopylai; their eternal glory was based upon the fact, 'that they, far away from their home, at a place where the command had put them, took their stand for no other reason but the command'. And Berve continued:

How could a Lacedaemonian king, how could troops of Spartiates have left their post to save a life whose highest fulfilment was to stand in battle regardless whether they won or died! Unthinkable the return of such a company! Certainly, the sacrifice was of no avail for central Greece and the Lacedaemonians themselves, whose aristocratic troops lost one twentieth of their numbers; but he who, in this case, asks for such a shallow benefit or even bases his judgement upon it, misunderstands Spartan warfare and fails to appreciate the strength which finally enabled Hellas to gain the victory over the Persian. The greatness as well as the impact of the deed lay in its futility (*Wie die Größe, so lag auch die Wirkung der Tat gerade in ihrer Nutzlosigkeit*).

(*Sparta*, Leipzig 1937, 78–9)

German historiography, after the hiatus of the First World War, unanimously transformed the polity on the Eurotas into a positively-viewed historical model of a *Führerstaat*. After 1933 scholars who identified themselves with the new regime defined Sparta as a quasi-National Socialist institution. The former pluralism of approaches and judgements was liquidated, academic discourse was allowed only within the ideological lines of the system. Sparta barely mattered as historical formation, but was integrated by intellectuals into a religious system which, as Arnaldo Momigliano once put it, 'had its major sanctuaries at Dachau and Auschwitz' (Momigliano (1966) 707–8).

Berve, like other prominent German Ancient Historians, was prepared to offer

an *interpretatio fascistica* of Spartan history which corroborated the ‘Aryan’ and ‘Nordic’ view of the past and was easily adopted by schoolteachers and classicists who hastily embraced the National Socialist *Weltanschauung*, ardently advocated racist theories and opportunistically emphasized the central importance of antiquity for the proper education of German *Volksgenossen* (Apel and Bittner (1994)). In those days pupils had to write essays on ‘Xenophon in the *Anabasis* and Adolf Hitler in his struggle for and in power’ or ‘The heroism in the *Odyssey* and today, especially as embodied in the *Führer* of ancient and modern times’ (cf. *Deutsches Philologenblatt* 42, 1934, 148–9). The warrior state of Sparta was an important subject in history teaching. Contemporary curricula reflected the relevance of Sparta to Nazi Germany. The tough military aristocracy commanded respect. Sexual asceticism and the bringing up of children were praised, the laws concerning marriage were approved as an outstanding means of eugenics. Scholars pointed to the freshness and youth of an uncivilized ‘barbarian’ community, but homoerotic and pederastic relations were only briefly mentioned or completely ignored, and Sparta’s fall was reduced to the process of degeneration (*Entartung*) and denordicization (*Entnordung*).

Already in 1934, Berve had postulated that a classical education ought to produce a man like Leonidas (cf. ‘Antike und nationalsozialistischer Staat’, *Vergangenheit und Gegenwart* 24, 1934, 270). In the same year, a teacher at a *Humanistisches Gymnasium* interpreted Greek history as the grand fight of the Nordic race against the aliens from Asia and Africa and praised the spirit of Leonidas and his followers: ‘Spirit of the spirit of our youth who, at Langemarck, died for *Volk und Reich*, spirit of the spirit of the heroic souls who, in the last fifteen years, have sacrificed blood and life to the revival of the German nature’ (H. Holtorf, ‘Platon im Kampf gegen die Entartung der nordischen Rasse’, *Deutsches Philologenblatt* 42, 1934, 270). Thermopylai was compared with Langemarck in Flanders where in the autumn of 1914 thousands of badly-trained and poorly-equipped young German soldiers were sent to their slaughter.

One year later, 1935, in an official journal, it was suggested that of all political organizations in Greece Sparta, under the aspect of racial history, must be most carefully scrutinized (‘Deutsche Wissenschaft, Erziehung und Volksbildung’, *Amtsblatt des Reichsministeriums für Wissenschaft, Erziehung und Volksbildung und der Unterrichtsverwaltung der Länder* 1, 1935, 28). At the Nazi elite school in Weimar, the *Adolf-Hitler-Schule*, an essay was written shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War, which was entitled ‘Spartan *Pimpfe*’; the ‘Pimpfe’ were the youngest subsection of the Hitler Youth. There one could read: ‘After lunch, which consisted of a simple blood soup, they used to steel their bodies in sporting competition. One of them was missing. He had been bloodily whipped, because he had been caught stealing. [...] The boys perhaps did not yet know why they enjoyed such an education.

But we know that Sparta remained strong, as long as the young people were educated in that way' (Losemann (2007a) 454–5; Roche 2013).

The case of Sparta clearly proves the influence of a Nazified classical scholarship on school teaching in the Third Reich. Berve also provided the ideological legitimization for teaching pupils the new image of ancient Sparta, since as he wrote in the preface of his little book on Sparta: 'The education of youth, the spirit of community, a soldierly way of living, integration and heroic testing of the individual, tasks and values indeed which have again arisen for ourselves, seem to have been coined here in such lucidity, and became infused so deeply and absolutely, that how this unique state was created is a vital topic for us to study' (*Sparta*, Leipzig 1937, 7). Hence W. Schröter, *Studienrat* at the *Altes Gymnasium* in Bremen, collected, in 1937, the most important sources for the battle of Thermopylai; the booklet, entitled 'Leonidas', was published as the third volume in the series *Führergestalten des Altertums*. Finally in 1940, the archaeologist Otto Wilhelm von Vacano (1910–1997) edited the pamphlet *Sparta: Der Lebenskampf einer nordischen Herrensicht* ('Sparta: The Struggle for Existence of a Nordic Master Race'), which was meant to be a textbook for the *Adolf-Hitler*-schools and gave Leonidas' final struggle a most prominent place. His example was exploited to justify heroic self-sacrifice and to encourage last-ditch resistance. Among the contributors were Richard Harder, Franz Miltner and Helmut Berve.

Following the end of the First World War, in German historiography the pluralist interpretation of Sparta, which had characterized earlier research, was abandoned. German over-enthusiasm for Sparta was based on the conviction that the peoples on the Rhine and on the Eurotas were racially closely connected and had a common Nordic background. It was argued that the ancient Spartans liked a strong state and took care of the *Volk* as the modern Germans did. However, the new image of Sparta, which was popularized through a flood of racist and *völkisch* publications (Puschner (2016)), was not the result of the 'national revolution' of 1933, but emerged from a complex amalgam of ideas and ideologies which were virulent long before the Nazis came into power. The vision of Sparta, propagated in the Third Reich, was essentially influenced by the adaptation of obscure racial categories, the revival of the Romantic dichotomy between Dorians and Ionians, the idealization of military duty and sacrifice after the military disaster of the First World War, the yearning for a strong *Führer* instead of a democratic government and the glorification of the *Volk*. Professional historians and classicists painted the new picture of Sparta as a proto-National Socialist state.

27.5 A Topic for Very Few Specialists: Sparta after 1945

Helmut Berve announced his last lecture on Sparta on 2 May 1945 (Losemann (1977) 231). It was never delivered. As Moses I. Finley argued in a radio talk in 1962, entitled 'The Myth of Sparta' and broadcast on the BBC Third Programme, there had been a deliberate revival of the myth of Sparta in Nazi Germany:

A number of Spartan qualities were singled out: the sharp division between a ruling élite and a subject population; total control by the state of all aspects of life and the suppression of all opposition; the rejection of 'softness', the conscious encouragement from childhood onwards of the need to be hard toward oneself, toward subject peoples, toward the enemy; the insistence that the state was an entity outside and above its individual members, with absolute priority in interests and demands over any and all requirements or desires of the individuals; the idea that a *Heldentod*, a hero's death, was the highest achievement to which a man could aspire.

(cf. Hodkinson 2010)

After the failure of the Third Reich the racist manipulation and ideological monopolization of Spartan history was de-legitimized.

In German scholarship Sparta was not very popular after 1945. For the majority of historians the history of the Athenian democracy was now far more interesting. It was not until 1983 that a professional historian wrote a concise 'History of Sparta' in German (Clauss (1983)). In the years between, some older contributions, e.g. Berve's *Griechische Geschichte* (2 vols, Freiburg im Breisgau 1951–52), were reprinted, even translated into other European languages, and were not warmly welcomed everywhere.

Momigliano for instance harshly attacked Berve in his review of the Italian version of the latter's *Greek History* (cf. Momigliano (1966) 699–708). But at Erlangen, where Berve taught Ancient History in the 1950s and early 1960s, and once again secured a leading position in the field, a younger generation of academics wrote some important studies on Sparta (Christ (1986) 222–3; Rebenich (2017)). The National Socialist manipulation of history led scholars back to specialized research; *Quellenkritik* instead of ideology and political commitment were now demanded. At the same time, the traditional *Volksgeschichte*, the 'history of peoples', was transformed into structuralist and social history. That process is reflected in Franz Kiechle's (1931–1991) postdoctoral dissertation (*Habilitation*) on Sparta and Laconia (Kiechle (1963)), where the ethnic and social structures of early Sparta and the interdependencies between political, social, constitutional and economic developments are reconstructed. Kiechle emphasized the social differences within the Spartan elite, advocated the existence of a Spartan aristocracy,

questioned the otherness of Sparta in the archaic age, discussed the relation between social diversity and political chance and argued that the transformation of the Spartan *kosmos* was a result of inner tensions. In short, he supplied the missing link between traditional *Volksgeschichte* and modern social history in German historiography on Sparta.

Some years earlier, Detlef Lotze (born 1930) had written his doctoral thesis on the dependent rural population in Greece (Lotze (1959)). The author discussed the legal status of helots and other similar groups and described the situation of helotry as a form of collective slavery. Although Berve supervised graduate students from the university of Jena in East Germany, Lotze, who was an independent scholar, was strongly influenced by Finley and materialistic theories of history. Kiechle's and Lotze's approaches were innovative, but isolated. Textbooks and general accounts of Greek history normally presented an old-fashioned image of Sparta. Only in the 1990s did a new generation of German historians rediscover ancient Sparta, adopting perceptions and ideas which were now introduced to the international discourse mainly by French and British scholars. Through the pioneering studies of Karl Christ (1923–2008) the reception of Sparta in German scholarship also became a topic in the history of historiography (e.g. Christ (1986); Christ (1999); Losemann (2003); Losemann (2007a); Rebenich (2002)).

Well before classical scholars, other writers reflected upon the deliberate revival and excessive instrumentalization of Sparta in Nazi Germany, as Roderick H. Watt has shown. Here 'we find the paradox that for the generation of writers who had experience of Nazi Germany the epitaph for the Spartans originally perceived as a monument to willing self-sacrifice for a common ideal transcending narrow national interests, has become a leitmotif, indeed a literary commonplace, to express dismay at the misrepresentation of that spirit by a militant nationalism and warped patriotism in the cause of a totalitarian ideology' (Watt (1985) 877). In other parts of German-speaking Europe the handling of Spartan history was less inhibited. 'The ancient ideal encapsulated in the myth of Thermopylai' was still present: 'it is the concept that there are some values that are worth dying for, as well as living for' (Cartledge (2006) 213). In Switzerland, in 1951, a booklet for young people was published which praised the Spartan state as a factory (*Werkstätte*) for the formation of man. Modern youth was encouraged to internalize Spartan virtues. The historical background of the story was the Persian War, when passionate patriotism (*leidenschaftliche Vaterlandsliebe*) defended freedom against bloodsucking imperialism (*blutsaugerischen Imperialismus*) (Schläpfer (1951)). But there are less martial reminiscences of the Greek city. On 6 June 1946, the academic football club 'SC Sparta Bern' was founded in the Swiss capital. The club members addressed each other as 'Spartans' and published a newsletter, also entitled '*Spartaner*'. Unfortunately, the club did

not win its last battle; after the season 1993/94 it merged with another football club and the name disappeared. At least in Bern, Spartans are no longer fighting for victory on the field.

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CHAPTER 28

Reception of Sparta in North America: *Eighteenth to Twenty-First Centuries*

Sean R. Jensen

The history of the reception of Sparta in North America covers a wide array of social and cultural contexts, from the discussions of the Framers of the American Constitution to the popular appreciations of twenty-first-century moviegoers. Conceptions of Sparta in the United States and Canada have generally followed broader North American social and political trends. Although it is difficult to gauge the exact degree of impact that Spartan history has played on American thought such as in the debates surrounding the drafting of the American constitution in 1787 or justifications for social and political institutions like slavery in the antebellum South, its presence as a reference, inspiration, and topic of intellectual and popular interest is undeniable.

Even though classical learning dominated the curriculum in American colleges and universities until the end of the nineteenth century, scholarship on Sparta in North America historically lagged behind that of Europe, a situation prevailing in many other fields of classical studies. Only at the turn of the twentieth century did North American scholars of Sparta generally embark on lines of research after their European counterparts had broken ground. Still, North American scholars are to be counted as some of the most important historians of Sparta in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In other respects ancient Sparta has achieved significant public visibility in the latter half of the twentieth century and first decade of the twenty-first, especially with the success of classically-themed novels and films. With the popularity of Frank Miller's graphic novel, *300*, and its film adaptation, the battle of Thermopylai hit the mainstream of ordinary consciousness and certain lines from the film have even become part of the modern American idiom.¹ Beginning in the early twentieth century throughout the United States and Canada, university and high-school sports teams have adopted the "Spartans" as their name, often using a presumed personification or iconic image of a Spartan as their mascot. The contemporary interest in, or even popularity of, ancient Sparta has generated other media applications and popular histories of the ancient city.

28.1 Reception of Sparta in the Eighteenth Century

In the eighteenth century, Americans generally learned their ancient history through the ancient authors themselves, whether in the original languages or in translation, and from popular British or European histories of Greece. Americans had yet to engage much in classical scholarship. Thus, histories of Greece and Rome had to come to the English colonies from Great Britain and the Continent. Some examples of such popular works of Greek history are Temple Stanyan's *Grecian History* (1739), Oliver Goldsmith's *Grecian History* (1774), and Charles Rollin's *Histoire Ancienne des Egyptiens, des Carthaginois, des Assyriens, des Babyloniens, des Mèdes, et des Perses, des Macédoniens, et des Grecs* (1730–38) (Winterer (2002) 20). Important European intellectuals such as Montesquieu were also influential in shaping colonial views of the ancient world (Reinhold (1984) 97). In general, educated Americans were introduced to the classical languages at an early age, and the curriculum in early colonial colleges like Harvard and Yale was heavily centered on the instruction in Greek and Latin as a part of the traditional study of the liberal arts (Reinhold (1984) 25–8 and Ziobro (2006) 18–28). According to Carl Richard, in the colonial period students usually began learning ancient languages at age eight either from grammar school instruction or from private tutors (Richard (1994) 1). By the time students were ready to enter college, they had already become acquainted with many of the authors that were part of the standard humanistic curriculum. However, the quality of such instruction was often poor (Richard (1994) 21). Emphasis was placed primarily on translation and broad knowledge of basic grammatical principles (Reinhold (1984) 26). Although ancient history was not a major part of the curriculum of the colonial college, many of the leaders of the Revolution and founders of the new American government in the 1780s were well acquainted with Greek and Roman history through explication of school texts and imported histories, and it was in the political sphere that ancient Sparta had its most discernible and lasting impact in North America in the eighteenth century.

Sparta, Athens, and especially Rome were viewed as early experiments in republican government by many of the most important Founders of the United States who sought historical parallels for the young American nation. Great importance was attached to examining the history of these early republics in order to understand the basis of their success, as Gordon Wood has observed: “The Americans’ compulsive interest in the ancient republics was in fact crucial to their attempt to understand the moral and social basis of politics” (Wood (1969) 50). Views of Sparta among the Founders were mixed. Spartan austerity and discipline, as exemplified in the ancient sources, most of all Plutarch, were appealing to some of the most prominent early Americans. For example, John Dickinson of Pennsylvania, delegate both of the Continental Congress and of the Constitutional Convention, the so-called “Penman of the

Revolution”, praised Spartan courage in battle:

To such a wonderful degree were the ancient Spartans, as brave and free a people as ever existed, inspired by this happy temperature of soul that rejecting even in their battles the use of trumpets and other instruments for exciting heat and rage, they marched up to the scenes of havoc and horror, with the sound of flutes, to the tunes of which their steps kept pace – “exhibiting,” as Plutarch says, “at once a terrible and delighted sight, and proceeding with a deliberate valor, full of hope and good assurance, as if some divinity had sensibly assisted them”.²

The prominent Boston Son of Liberty, Samuel Adams, cousin of John Adams, hoped that Boston would become a “Christian Sparta,” implying that pre-Christian Sparta represented admirable forms of virtue and piety (Rahe (1992) 58). Even the famous critic of the classical education, Benjamin Rush, a signatory of the Declaration of Independence, praised the plain “black broth” of the Spartan diet (Richard (2008) 31).

At the same time, colonial Americans criticized the militaristic and collective nature of the Spartan social system. Thomas Jefferson referred to the Spartan system as “the rule of military monks over the laboring class of the people, reduced to abject slavery” and Alexander Hamilton (first Secretary of the Treasury, 1789–95) in *Federalist No. 6* stated “Sparta was little better than a well-regulated camp.”³ Along with the militarism associated with the ancient Spartan state, the Spartan rejection of commercial activity was also criticized. For example, John Adams (second President, 1797–1801) argued for American pursuit of commerce by asserting that emulation of the “Spartans in their Contempt of Wealth” should be avoided (Rahe (1992) 325). Although Adams in his *Defence of the Constitutions of the United States* (1787–88) mixed praise with criticism of the Spartan system (see later), he particularly found fault with the strict control over the citizenry that Lykourgos supposedly instituted, even faulting the motivation of the legendary lawgiver after a description of the various prohibitions such as the laws against travel and use of coined money: “he shackled the Spartans to the ambitious views of his family for fourteen successions of Herculean kings, at the expence of the continual disturbance of all Greece, and the constant misery of his own people.”⁴ In the Adams family, criticism of Sparta was not limited to John. In a 1786 debate at Harvard, his son, the young John Quincy Adams (sixth President, 1825–29) claimed:

The fine feelings of the Heart which render human Nature amiable, were entirely excluded from the system of Lycurgus. Many of his Laws display a barbarous Cruelty, and beauteous Science, whose persuasive Voice, calms the impetuous Passions of Youth, soothes the cares, and asswages the infirmities of age, was discarded from within the walls of Sparta by this savage Legislator.⁵

In general, the most influential source on Sparta for colonial Americans was Plutarch's biography of Lykourgos, the mythical early lawgiver and architect of the Spartan constitution (Reinhold (1984) 250, 253). Plutarch's biographies, read both in the original Greek and in translation, were greatly responsible for forming these sometimes contradictory views of ancient Sparta (Reinhold (1984) 253). At times, the heavy moralistic tone of Plutarch's biography of Lykourgos and particular conception of the Spartan state were especially appealing to colonial Americans seeking appropriate models of behavior for citizens of the young Republic, while they also engendered criticism both from the Republican Jefferson and the Federalists, Adams and Hamilton.

Together with Republican Rome, Sparta played an important role as a direct source for the political structure of the United States. The theory of the separation of powers was a dominant issue in the midst of the debates before and during the Constitutional Convention. Ancient theory of the "mixed constitution" developed by Plato, Aristotle, and Polybius had greatly influenced Western thinkers from the Middle Ages through colonial America.⁶ The Framers drew many of their notions of Sparta's stability, strong agrarian culture (as opposed to commercial Athens), and celebrated mixed constitution from these ancient theorists. Sparta was a source for much of the current political theory about the balance of institutional powers, and John Adams was a particularly enthusiastic proponent of the idea of mixed government during the debates surrounding the Constitution. In his *Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America* Adams praised the stability of the Spartan constitution attributed to Lykourgos:

Six kinds of government must be allowed: kingly government and monarchy, aristocracy and oligarchy, democracy, and the government of the multitude. Lycurgus concluded, that every form of government that is simple, by soon degenerating into that vice that is allied to it, must be unstable. ... Lycurgus to avoid these inconveniencies [*sic*] formed his government not of one sort, but united in one all of the advantages and properties of the best governments; to the end that no branch, by swelling beyond its due bounds, might degenerate into the vice which is congenial to it ...⁷

The Spartan model was also referenced to support the establishment of an American senate. In *Federalist No. 63*, James Madison ("Father of the Constitution"; later fourth President, 1809–17) cited ancient Sparta along with Rome and Carthage as examples of successful republics with a strong senate, writing, "It adds no small weight to these considerations, to recollect that history informs us of no long-lived republic which had not a senate. Sparta, Rome, and Carthage are in fact, the only states to whom that character can be applied."⁸ Although Adams and Madison were drawn to the longevity and stability of the Spartan constitution, Polybius' version of the Roman Republic

as the ideal example of a mixed constitution seems to have had a greater influence on the Framers (Richard (2008) 97). Adams considered the Roman Republic to be the ideal mixture of the aristocratic, executive, and democratic branches stating:

All three principal orders of government were found in the Roman commonwealth; everything was constituted and administered with that equality and propriety by these three, that it was not possible, even for a Roman citizen, to assert positively, whether the government, in the whole, was aristocratical, democratical, or monarchical.⁹

As debates surrounded the drafting of the constitution of the United States arose, so did discussions concerning the proper role of women in the new republic. In this debate, the women of Sparta made famous in the pages of Plutarch were natural reference points for a culture well-versed in classical literature. In particular, the brave Spartan woman selflessly sending her son to battle and preaching an unbending patriotism to the state or as a soldier herself were the models that appealed in this period (Winterer (2007) 71–9). For example, the notable early feminist Judith Sargent Murray (1751–1820) in the last decades of the eighteenth century advocated the equality of women. In *The Gleaner* (1798) she referenced the women of Sparta as an example of feminine strength and patriotism who even suppressed their natural duties as mothers for the greater good of the state:

The character of the Spartan women is marked with uncommon firmness. At the shrine of patriotism they immolated nature. Undaunted bravery and unimpeached honour, was, in their estimation, far beyond affection. The name of Citizen possessed, for them, greater charms than that of Mother; and so highly did they prize the warrior's meed, that they are said to have shed tears of joy over the bleeding bodies of their wounded sons!

(Skemp (1998) 186)

Murray was particularly notable in her call for gender equality during the birth of a new country. The theme of the powerful and independent Spartan woman has been popular throughout American history and evolved with the times, even appearing in the culture of the modern US military and among modern historians, as will be discussed later below.

In the end, the unique nature of the Spartan social system was perceived as too brutal and too unlike the world of eighteenth century America, thus limiting Sparta's influence on the Constitution (Richard (2008) 32, 97). Hamilton's statement that Sparta was a "well-regulated camp" coupled with Jefferson's view that Spartans were "military monks" helped to ensure that Rome would have greater lasting impact on the early United States. At the same time, other examples of cooperative government drawn from ancient Greece were also studied by the Founders, such as the federal leagues and the

Amphictyonic League.¹⁰ Though admired for her great cultural achievements, Athens was generally rejected as a political model because she was historically perceived as having been too unstable and feckless.¹¹ In *Federalist No. 55* which emphasized the capricious nature of popular assemblies, Madison wrote of Athens: “Had every Athenian citizen been a Socrates, every Athenian assembly would still have been a mob.”

Yet, it was not universally agreed that ancient republics were natural sources for constructing a modern one. Hamilton, as early as 1782, denied the utility of employing ancient Greece and Rome as models for the “modern” world (Reinhold (1984) 255–6). Charles Pinckney of South Carolina at the Constitutional Convention in 1787 declared, “Can we copy Greece and Rome? ... We surely differ from the whole. Our situation is unexampled” (Reinhold (1984) 215). In the early nineteenth century, John Taylor, a constitutional theorist and politician of Jeffersonian affinity, leveled criticism at John Adams for employing ancient Sparta as an example of a politically balanced republic, and observed that, in general, lessons from antiquity had no real value for the modern world (Reinhold (1984) 107). Some of Taylor’s most strident criticism was targeted at the Lykourgan constitution:

Lycurgus, by the influence of a bought and lying oracle, placed the government in the hands of a minority, excused this minority from labour and taxes, and supported it by the labour of the majority. The Helots, who were the slaves of the government but not of individuals, filled the place of every majority, however denominated, subjected to the will of an aristocracy ... This emblem of Mr. Adams’s system, commenced in fraud; flourished, a tyrant; and died, a traitor.¹²

For Taylor, the Spartan system was not a model of balance but of oppression and inequality.

Overall, the Founding Fathers identified both strengths and weaknesses in the ancient accounts of Sparta. Dickinson’s praise of Spartan courage and discipline was typical of the Founding Fathers’ admiration of the Plutarchan version of Sparta, while others viewed the unique nature of the ancient city as an inappropriate source of inspiration for the new nation, both politically and culturally. These often contradictory views of ancient Sparta render it difficult to gauge the extent of its influence on colonial America. However, it is fair to say that the collective nature of Spartan society and the perceived rigidity of the Lykourgan system were ultimately deemed unsuitable for a growing liberty-minded young republic or perhaps even for a democracy.

28.2 Reception of Sparta in the Nineteenth Century

In the first decades of the nineteenth century, Hellenism grew increasingly

popular in the United States. For instance, Greek architecture largely replaced the Roman-influenced style and the study of Greek language and literature grew in importance in college curricula.¹³ The War of Greek Independence (1821–29) played an important role in popularizing Hellenism in the United States, and Americans traveled in increasing numbers to Greece throughout this period (Winterer (2002) 63). Much of American interest in the War of Greek Independence lay with sympathy to the Greek struggle for liberty under the Ottomans (Winterer (2002) 63).

In the American South, classical learning especially thrived in the antebellum period (Miles (1971) 262). Knowledge of the classical languages and ancient history were seen as characteristics that defined a refined and learned gentleman in a culture of elite leisure based on slave labor.¹⁴ As cultural divisions between the North and South intensified in the antebellum period, the heightened popularity of classical tradition in the South was seen by many prominent Southerners as a mark of distinction from the more commercially-oriented northern half of the country (Miles (1971) 258, 262–3). The city-states of Classical Greece and the period of the Roman Republic became the favorite models for Southerners seeking ancient parallels for their cultural and political outlook.¹⁵ Pro-slavery theorist George Fitzhugh even asserted that Southerners were descended from the Romans through the Jacobites and Huguenots (Miles (1971) 264). Athens was especially appealing to Southerners drawn to Athenian-style democracy and cultural achievements (Winterer (2002) 66). Athens was generally considered the closest and most desirable parallel for the South. One writer in the *Southern Quarterly Review* in 1847 praised Athens in these terms: “In the whole course of history, ancient and modern, there is no period to which we revert with fresher interest or more underlying enthusiasm, than to the short era of Athenian ascendancy in Greece” (Miles (1971) 27). Less often, Southerners referenced Sparta as a particularly successful state.¹⁶

One of the most notable comparisons Southerners made with Greek and Roman antiquity concerned the existence of slavery. As the issue of slavery gradually became divisive in the United States, the examples of slavery systems in the ancient world were often used as a defense for the South’s “peculiar institution.” In seeking these justifications in the historical tradition for the practice of human bondage, appeal was most frequently made to the Bible (Faust (1981) 10–11). Nevertheless, the examples of Greece and Rome were also popular with apologists of slavery (Faust (1981) 12). In particular, Greece and Rome were often cited to argue that slavery was integral to the success of these civilizations (Faust (1981) 12). Naturally, Sparta was included among the Greek states, cited by defenders of slavery along with Athens. Examples of this type of historical justification referencing Sparta can be found in the writings of notable apologists of slavery including Thomas Roderick Dew, William Harper, and James Henry Hammond. Born in 1802 in

Virginia, Dew was educated at the College of William and Mary (Faust (1981) 21). There he became a prominent professor of political law, eventually rising to the presidency of the college in 1836 (Faust (1981) 21). Dew was inspired to respond to the climate of support for emancipation that followed Nat Turner's 1831–32 slave uprising in Virginia (Faust (1981) 21). His *Review of the Debate in the Virginia Legislature of 1831–2* was highly influential throughout the South (Faust (1981) 21). The following quotation comes from a piece published in the *American Quarterly Review* entitled "Abolition of Negro Slavery" (September 1832). In the essay, Dew looked to Sparta for evidence of the compatibility of slavery with a free society:

3dly. *It has been contended that slavery is unfavorable to a republican spirit:* but the whole history of the world proves that this is far from being the case. In the ancient republics of Greece and Rome, where the spirit of liberty glowed with the most intensity, the slaves were more numerous than the freeman. Aristotle, and the great men of antiquity, believed slavery necessary to keep alive the spirit of freedom. In Sparta, the freeman was even forbidden to perform the office of slaves, lest he might lose the spirit of independence.

(Faust (1981) 66)

William Harper, born in Antigua in 1790, hailed from South Carolina. A lawyer by trade, he eventually became an outspoken supporter of states' rights and Nullification (the doctrine that states had the right to negate federal legislation that violated their privileges) (Faust (1981) 78). Harper's essay entitled *Memoir of Slavery* (1838) cited Sparta to support the argument that slavery was beneficial for the instruction and upbringing of the young: "It was not without a knowledge of nature, that the Spartans exhibited the vices of slaves by way of negative example to their children" (Faust (1981) 116). Here, Harper is presumably speaking of the humiliating treatment of the state-owned slaves (Helots), who were forced to become drunk and to dance absurdly by the Spartan ruling class during the common meals called *syssitia*. For Harper, the case of Sparta demonstrated the educational benefits for a society owning slaves. Finally, James Henry Hammond, born in South Carolina in 1807, was himself a lawyer, congressman, governor of South Carolina, and senator, known as an ardent supporter of slavery (Faust (1981) 168). In his "Letter to an English Abolitionist" (1845), he argued that, contrary to some judgments, slavery did "not weaken Rome, nor Athens, nor Sparta, though their slaves were comparatively far more numerous than ours, of the same color for the most part with themselves, and large numbers of them familiar with the use of arms" (Faust (1981) 178).

For apologists of slavery, the examples of Greece and Rome provided evidence of the compatibility of a bondage system with a "free" republic. As we have seen, the cult of Greece as the home of small republics flourished in

the South throughout the first half of the nineteenth century where local communal identification was strong. The popularity of classical learning in the South during the antebellum period was certainly a factor in the use of Sparta and Athens as historical parallels, though the knowledge of ancient Sparta was still rather superficial even among the educated southern elite. For instance, there was no real effort to distinguish between the different types of human bondage practiced in Greece, such as Helotage in Sparta, a system in which the slaves were tied to the land in a serf-like status, and chattel slavery at Athens. Nonetheless, the wealth of references to Sparta reveals the continued importance of antiquity as a paradigm in American political life.

At the same time, abolitionists drew on ancient Greece for their own understanding of slavery in the nineteenth century. The well-known abolitionist Lydia Marie Child (1802–80) frequently drew upon Sparta in her own writings against slavery.¹⁷ In her *An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans called Africans* (1833), Child referred to the slave systems of antiquity including Sparta to support her argument that the freer the state, the harsher the treatment of slaves:

it is worthy of remark that the conditions of slaves has always been worse just in proportion to the freedom enjoyed by their masters. In Greece, none were so proud of liberty as the Spartans; and they were a proverb among the neighboring states for their severity to slaves.¹⁸

Here again Sparta is regarded as a paradigm of a free republic, yet for Child the lesson drawn from Spartan history is the exact opposite of the one drawn by pro-slavery advocates of the period. Child's historical novel *Philothea* (1836) is set in classical Greece where Athens and Sparta represent the North and South of the antebellum period. Sparta is portrayed as a particularly cruel slave society and is contrasted with an enlightened version of Athens (Winterer (2007) 173–4). Child, like the apologists of slavery with whom she battled, regarded ancient Sparta as a society very much defined by slavery.

In 1861, the outbreak of Civil War in the United States offered another opportunity for nineteenth century America to refer to antiquity as a model for the present day. Parallels were made between the American conflict and the Peloponnesian War fought by Athens and Sparta in the late 5th century BC. During the American Civil War, the South was generally perceived as resembling the Spartans, particularly by Southerners. For example, the great nineteenth-century classicist Basil Gildersleeve wrote on the current popularity of making comparisons between the two wars in an essay entitled "A Southerner in the Peloponnesian War" and in other writings from the period. In 1863, Gildersleeve observed: "First we had the Peloponnesian war, in which Athens was made to represent the North, and Sparta the South, in which Pericles was degraded into similitude with Seward; Nicias with McClellan" (Briggs (1998) 119). Gildersleeve also identified similarities with

his own time in the geographical position of the two antagonists of the Peloponnesian War:

We must acknowledge that the general outlines of the two wars actually present some striking and instructive points of comparison: such a point is the geographical position of the combatants, the one in the North, the other in the South – although Canada is not arrayed against New York as Boeotia was against Athens ...

(Briggs (1998) 119)

Not only was Athens' progressive democracy seen as a parallel to the North's, while Sparta's conservative agrarian-based economy seemed to have similarities with plantation culture of the South, but Gildersleeve compared the course of the Civil War to that of the Peloponnesian War:

The revolt of Lesbos from the Athenians presents a wonderful analogy to the uprising of the Marylanders – if they had only risen up – the capture of the “full-blooded” Spartans on Sphacteria, is an exact parallel to the taking of Roanoke Island and the Richmond Blues – only the Spartans held out longer.

(Briggs (1998) 120)

Finally, in Gildersleeve's article “A Southerner in the Peloponnesian War”, he made the comparisons between the two wars explicit:

The Peloponnesian war, like our war, was a war between two leagues, a Northern Union and a Southern Confederacy. The Northern Union, represented by Athens, was a naval power. The Southern Confederacy, under the leadership of Sparta, was a land power. The Athenians represented the progressive element, the Spartans the conservative. The Athenians believed in a strong centralized government. The Lacedaemonians professed greater regard for autonomy.

(Briggs (1998) 398)

Strikingly perhaps, Gildersleeve failed to note any parallel for the most obvious and significant feature of the war, namely its origin in a secession or rebellion. Still, the American Civil War offered the opportunity to Americans to see their own conflict as a modern Peloponnesian War, with the South taking on the role of Sparta in place of Athens, which had been the preferred choice for many Southerners in the antebellum period.

The cultural impact of Sparta throughout the nineteenth century is also evident in other ways. As settlements were founded in the new United States and Canada, many communities chose such names as “Sparta” or “Spartanburg” or “Laconia”. Cities called Sparta are spread from the eastern United States to the Pacific Ocean. Examples of these communities include: Sparta Township in New Jersey; Sparta, North Carolina; and Sparta, Oregon.

The county and city of Spartanburg were founded in South Carolina, while a Laconia was established in New Hampshire. In Canada, the community of Sparta was founded in the province of Ontario in the early nineteenth century. The profusion of cities named Sparta should not seem unusual considering the popularity of naming communities after famous European and Near-Eastern cities, including other prominent Greek and Roman cities as well as places named in the Bible. The classical education of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century here played a clear role.¹⁹

28.3 Popular Reception in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries

Beginning in the early twentieth century, Sparta has become a popular source for the eponyms or mascots of high school, college, and university sports teams. Notable examples include Michigan State University founded in 1855 and San Jose State University founded in 1857. Michigan State adopted the nickname “Spartans” in 1926 while San Jose State students selected the “Spartans” as their mascot in 1942.²⁰ Numerous other colleges and universities have adopted the Spartan mascot including Case Western Reserve University, Norfolk State University in Virginia, and the University of North Carolina-Greensboro. Countless high schools across North America have also adopted this nomenclature for their athletic teams. The courage and sense of duty attributed to the Spartan hoplite soldier have traditionally been valued by athletic teams seeking inspiration and models for competition and teamwork.

Like other popular mascots for sports programs and franchises named after other warrior groups (e.g., the Vikings or the Trojans), the imagery generally employs popular markers to convey the fearsome aspects of the Spartan hoplite. For example, Michigan State, San Jose State, and Case Western Reserve University employ as a logo variations of the Corinthian style hoplite helmet topped with a distinctive crest. Their mascots are often caricatures of a Spartan hoplite given an affectionate name such as Michigan State’s “Sparty” and San Jose State’s “Sammy.” Sparty is characterized as an absurdly muscular soldier in hoplite armor, and Sammy is likewise a cartoonish representation of a Spartan warrior. Thus, these mascots combine the characteristics of fearsome hoplite warrior with those of a jovial puppet. The widespread popularity of the ancient Spartans as a source of sports mascots reflects common notions of Sparta in the United States and Canada. It is notable that this popular appreciation does not extend to other notable ancient Greek states such as Athens. In particular, Sparta is associated with a militaristic ethos shared with other groups such as the Vikings or Native American warriors who provide totemic names for sports teams in North America. One might be tempted to trace this phenomenon to the depiction of

the Spartan upbringing and of its ethos of testing and acculturation through athletic competition, so prominent in the accounts of Plutarch. There may be a tendency to lump the Spartans with Vikings, Trojans, and various Native American “avatars”, unfortunate since these warrior groups are distinct in many ways. Nonetheless, the particular view of the Spartans as embodying the characteristics of strength, bravery, and competitive *élan* is also evident in other areas of American popular culture in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The most popular aspect of ancient Spartan history in the United States and Canada in the latter half of the twentieth century and first decade of the twenty-first has probably been the depiction of the last stand of the Spartans at Thermopylai in 480 BC against an invading Persian army. The events surrounding the defeat of the Greek force led by King Leonidas have been celebrated since the colonial period. In general, the popular legend of the battle of Thermopylai has had an impact on American notions of liberty and self-identity as a free, self-governing people. As early as the late eighteenth century, Thomas Jefferson and the other founders praised Leonidas and the 300 just as they had other aspects of Sparta (Richard (1994) 73). In the twentieth century, the legend of the “300” hit the mainstream of public consciousness. Books, Hollywood films, and video games have all frequently captured the theme of the last stand of the 300 Spartans. *Go Tell the Spartans*, a 1978 film, recounted the experiences of American soldiers in Vietnam. The title of the film is a rendering of the opening line of the poet Simonides’ famous epitaph for the Spartans who died fighting Xerxes’ army: ὦ ξεῖν’, ἀγγέλλειν Λακεδαιμονίοις. Popular novels based on the battle of Thermopylai include Steven Pressfield’s *Gates of Fire: An Epic Novel of the Battle of Thermopylae* (1998) and Frank Miller’s *300* (1998). Although Nicholas Nicastro’s *Isle of Stone: A Novel of Ancient Sparta* (2005) does not have Thermopylai as its theme, instead favoring the Peloponnesian War, it certainly reflects a popular interest in Spartan military history and shares many of the same ideas. Pressfield’s novel is a fictional account of the lone survivor of the battle. Pressfield has written other novels that have popularized ancient Greek military strategies and conquests such as *Tides of War* (2001) and *The Virtues of War: A Novel of Alexander the Great* (2005). Frank Miller’s work has also achieved a great deal of success while generating much controversy. As a stylized account of the battle in comic book form, there is little attempt to portray the battle of Thermopylai accurately. Yet, the graphic novel has achieved widespread success even spawning a wildly successful film. Miller was inspired by an earlier film *The 300 Spartans* (1962), an international production with some American leads that was presented by Twentieth Century Fox.

These popular works about Sparta reflect an enduring interest in ancient Greek warfare in the context of a heroic final stand. In both Europe and North

America, the moral success of the small Greek force against vast odds has been interpreted as symbolic of a larger struggle of liberty against tyranny. Sparta is often portrayed as a republic fighting for the preservation of the freedom of all of Greece. Two major American films have been based on the battle of Thermopylai, *The 300 Spartans* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1962) directed by Rudolphe Maté and *300* (Warner Bros., 2007) directed by Zach Snyder. The 1962 film shot on location in Greece starred Richard Egan and boasted an international cast.²¹ Although the film's setting was the Persian invasion of 480 BC, it reflects in some ways the contemporary Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union (Clough (2004) 375). The Spartan sacrifice is portrayed as part of a larger struggle for the freedom of the West against the tyrannical East. *300*, based on Miller's novel and starring Gerard Butler, led to a good deal of controversy around the world. The struggle in the film between the Greeks and the Persians has been seen as representative of the modern-day conflict between the West and Iran (possibly representing Islam), while also incurring some criticism for its lack of historical accuracy, in particular in the portrayal of ancient Persians. In general, the representations of the Persians and Greek hoplites are more impressionistic than historical with the character Xerxes, played by Rodrigo Santoro, especially fanciful. The Great King is depicted as a half-naked hairless giant, who at one point in the film attempts to seduce Leonidas in an erotic fashion in an attempt to convince him to surrender. Throughout the film the effeminate, almost androgynous, Xerxes is contrasted with the masculine Spartan king. Moreover, great effort is made to contrast the combatants by emphasizing the courage and prowess of the Spartans at the expense of the Persians. The Spartans fight with bare torsos instead of donning breastplates, which has the effect of revealing the muscular chests of the hoplites. The blockbuster success of *300* even inspired a popular parody entitled *Meet The Spartans* (Twentieth Century Fox), released in 2008.

The popularity of the novels and films surrounding Thermopylai has also led to numerous television documentaries on Spartan history and Leonidas' last stand. The general resurgence of classical antiquity in the popular sphere in the early twenty-first century, witnessed by the film *Gladiator* (2000) and the HBO series *Rome*, is connected with a thriving market for classically-themed films. At the same time, military strategy-themed video games form a new market for ancient Sparta. Notable Spartan-themed games include *Ancient Wars: Sparta* (2007, Playlogic), *Great War Nations: The Spartans* (2008, Dreamcatcher), and *Spartan* (2004, Graphsim Entertainment).

As during the American Civil War, the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta was viewed by many in the twentieth century as a parallel for major conflicts of the era.²² Some prominent American politicians, journalists, and political scientists looked to the origins and course of the Peloponnesian War as a helpful guide to understanding and predicting the

long Cold War between the Soviet Union and United States. Thucydides was an important source for these comparisons and was mined for relevant theory.²³ At the same time, Thucydides' characterization of Athens and Sparta in large part determined the modern identifications of the United States and Soviet Union with their ancient Greek counterparts. Each side of this conflict was portrayed as either the modern Athens or Sparta, sometimes even by the statesmen shaping the events. For example, Henry Kissinger once compared the United States to Athens and the Soviets to Sparta.²⁴ However, it should be noted that analogizing Sparta as the Soviet Union was mainly a later development and did not immediately commence when the Cold War began in the late 1940s.²⁵ On the surface, the Cold War and Peloponnesian War did share some similarities. The two sides in the Cold War were very much ideological rivals, as were Athens and Sparta. Athens was a progressive democracy that favored democrats throughout the Greek world, while Sparta represented, at least in the pages of Thucydides, a conservative oligarchic state, backward intellectually and economically. Furthermore, the Western allies, including the United States, were market-based economies, which were integrated in material terms by an ever-intensifying commerce (whose later manifestations we now recognize as globalism). In this sense, the United States as the exemplar of western democracy was seen as a modern-day Athens, while the authoritarian Soviets seemed to resemble Thucydidean Sparta. The secretiveness of the Spartan state compared to the openness of Athens was another point of similarity with the Soviet Union. Moreover, the belief that the Peloponnesian War was a bipolar conflict defined by two camps dominated by Athens and Sparta was also influential.²⁶ An example of this type of analysis can be seen in the work of the prominent American political scientist Robert Gilpin. Gilpin explicitly links Athens with the United States and the Soviet Union with Sparta, although admittedly exercising some caution:

The similarities between fifth-century B.C. Greece and the closing decades of the twentieth century are indeed striking. Two former allies, having defeated the common enemy, turn on one another. On one side, the protagonist (the United States, like Athens) is democratic, commercial, and a sea power. The other side (the Soviet Union, like Sparta) is authoritarian, autarchic, and a land power.²⁷

Scholars of ancient Greece have also contributed to such comparisons. Notable American historians such as Donald Kagan and Alvin Bernstein have made connections between the antagonists of the Cold War and the Peloponnesian War. Reflecting some common conceptions of the similarities between the two conflicts, Kagan wrote in 1995:

In fundamental ways the new situation resembled the structure of international relations in the Hellenic world after the Peloponnesian War, a similarity often remarked upon during the Cold War. The world was

“bipolar”, divided into discrete blocs led by powers of very different kinds, rivals for the leading position, fearful and suspicious of one another. It was common in the West to identify the open, individualistic, democratic society of Athens with the similar one of the United States and the closed, communal, statist society of Sparta with Russia but, as we have seen, although the analogy between the internal character of the societies is reasonable, it breaks down when applied to external affairs. In ancient Greece, Sparta led a coalition of states, many of whom were quite independent, that resembled NATO more than the Warsaw Pact, and its policy was essentially static, intended to maintain the status quo that preserved its primacy and security. It was democratic Athens that was the dynamic, disruptive state, whose expansion and power the Spartans found threatening. The Delian League, which really had become an Athenian Empire, more closely resembled the Warsaw Pact, which badly disguised a Soviet Empire. In the twentieth century it was the Soviet Union, like Athens after the Persian Wars, that had used its victory swiftly to expand its territory and power, which challenged and alarmed the United States, a state, like Sparta, generally satisfied with the status quo and eager to preserve its advantages.

(Kagan (1995) 444)

Bernstein has commented on the similarities between the Soviet and Spartan economies, writing:

The Soviet economy, unlike ours but like the Spartan, thoroughly entwined its defense sector in the economy at large so that defense spending could not stand out as an identifiable, discrete subsector. In effect, both Sparta’s and the Soviet Union’s economies responded to the dictates of those in control rather than to the market, were not subject to the laws of supply and demand, and were designed to endure the priority of security.²⁸

Although all of these historians have cautioned those analogizing the Peloponnesian and Cold Wars, nonetheless, they have noted parallels between the two conflicts and even between the actors themselves.

The influence of Sparta can also be traced in the contemporary culture of the US military. The National Infantry Association awards the Shield of Sparta-Heroine of the Infantry to spouses of members of the US Infantry. According to the National Infantry Association website, the award is presented to:

a spouse who has contributed significantly to the Infantry. The NIA’s goal is to recognize spouses of Infantrymen and other esteemed ladies, in support roles, whose contributions deserve special recognition by the National Infantry Association and the Infantry community. The award is a token of appreciation for the sacrifice and commitment demanded of the wives and supporters of Infantrymen. It further symbolizes these women as

true patriots with selfless ideals and the courage to send their Infantrymen into harms [*sic*] way.²⁹

This award recognizing the importance of women “in the support roles” seems to reflect the strong position of women in Spartan society recorded in ancient historiography. In particular, Plutarch provides many of the famous portraits and quotations of anonymous Spartan women who, dutifully following the strict Spartan ethos, demanded from their sons and husbands the same level of commitment to duty and sacrifice. For instance, one anonymous Spartan mother is said to have told her son when handing to him a shield for battle “child, this or on it”, τέκνον, ἔφη, ἢ τὰν ἢ ἐπὶ τῷ, implying that he is to return victorious with his shield or carried back on it as a fatality of war (Plut. *Mor.* 241F16).

The American service academies have also historically drawn on certain conceptions of ancient Sparta as part of their institutional identity. The academies have attempted to balance what are generally referred to as “Athenian and Spartan” cultures. The struggle between a culture that promotes military discipline and training associated with Sparta and one that also emphasizes intellectual growth is a natural result of inherent tensions within institutions devoted to military education. Sparta and Athens seem to be natural reference points. Both historians of the service academies and academy officials themselves have characterized the evolution of these institutions in these terms.³⁰ For example, John P. Lovell, political scientist and graduate of West Point, has described the tension between these cultures as a struggle between Athenian and Spartan ideals:

The terms *Spartan* and *Athenian* are used here metaphorically rather than literally. The Spartan ideals are those of the noble warrior: austerity, discipline, the comradeship of arms, devotion to the state, and, above all, a commitment to heroic deeds and a love of glory. Athenian ideals, in contrast, are especially those of culture and learning. It is not necessary to argue that service academy officials consciously sought to emulate their classical forebears in Sparta to recognize these ideals have been important elements of the academy subcultures.

(Lovell (1979) 16)

Lovell makes explicit the comparison with the supposed Athenian and Spartan cultures in the development of the curriculum of the academies:

From the nineteenth century until the eve of World War II, the trade school orientation of the academies, the emphasis on “building character” and instilling discipline as the primary mission, insured that a commitment to Athens would remain comfortably subordinated to a commitment to Sparta. However, the combination of accreditation requirements generated by authorization to award the baccalaureate degree, beginning in the

1930s, and the widespread recognition at the end of World War II of the complexity of professional demands in the postwar environment, led to an increase in emphasis upon the academic component of the academy mission.

(Lovell (1979) 253)

Thus, after the Second World War, this issue became increasingly important and the institutional trend of the service academies was toward a more “Athenian” academic culture, but not with the total exclusion of the “Spartan” emphasis on traditional military instruction. The historical view of Sparta as the exemplar of a uniquely military society and Athens as the source of western humanism has even informed the development of military education in the United States.

28.4 North-American Scholarship

The literature on Sparta is vast, but historically has been dominated by European scholars, and it is difficult to trace the study of Sparta among North American historians before the twentieth century. Nevertheless, by the first half of the century, North American scholars had begun to contribute significantly to the subject. One of the earliest and most important American historians of Sparta was J.A.O. Larsen, who published a series of articles on the Spartan-led Peloponnesian League and political structure of the state in the 1930s.³¹ Larsen is probably best known as an authoritative scholar of Greek federalism. Though active at Cambridge University in England for most of his career, another important American historian who studied Sparta was M.I. Finley, generally regarded as one of the most important historians of Greece of the twentieth century. Like Larsen, Finley is mainly known for his work on other areas of Greek history, particularly social and economic history, but still contributed some signal scholarship on Sparta.³² His article entitled “Sparta” published in 1968 examined the major social and political features of the so-called “Spartan Revolution” of the archaic period. Donald Kagan, successively professor of Greek history at Cornell and Yale, has been an influential historian of the causes and course of the Peloponnesian War, and of numerous other important aspects of fifth-century Spartan history.³³ His work entitled “The Outbreak of The Peloponnesian War” (1969) has been instrumental in setting much of the scholarly debate concerning the controversial issues of the war and, in particular like Larsen, the structure of the Spartan-led Peloponnesian League. Since the 1970s, American and Canadian scholars have become increasingly interested in Spartan history, which now challenges that of Athens in its received importance. Important examples include contributions of Thomas Figueira, Charles Hamilton, and Nigel Kennell. Figueira has tackled a variety of issues ranging from the size

of the Spartan economy to the complicated issue of Messenian identity.³⁴

The supposed uniqueness of the ancient Spartan state, and especially the role of women, continue to interest students of Sparta today just as it did in antiquity. North American scholars Sarah Pomeroy and Ellen Millender have been some of the leading international figures in the study of Spartan women. Pomeroy's *Spartan Women* (2002) is the first book-length study devoted to the subject and she has been a pioneer in the field of women in antiquity since the 1970s.³⁵ Her book on the women of Sparta is heavily influenced by contemporary feminist theory in the United States and argues that Spartan women had a place in society unusual for its time in the Greek world. Millender is noteworthy for challenging ancient and modern notions of a Spartan "difference."³⁶ Popular scholarly works touching on Sparta have become more available in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Certainly, the success of classically-themed movies and novels is partly responsible for the popularity of this tendency in scholarship. Victor Davis Hanson's works on Greek warfare including *A War Like No Other: How the Athenians and Spartans Fought the Peloponnesian War* (2005) have had broad appeal both to historians and the wider public. Hanson's expertise in Greek military history is well-established. Though he does not hail from North America, Cambridge University's Paul Cartledge has recently authored popular books on Sparta such as *The Spartans: The World of the Warrior-Heroes of Ancient Greece* (2003) and *Thermopylai: The Battle That Changed the World* (2006), which have found a ready audience in the United States and Canada. It is clear that ancient Sparta continues to be an intriguing subject to North Americans. Whether it is the battle of Thermopylai or the Peloponnesian War, the modern North American continues to be fascinated by the Spartans as much as by their ancient Athenian counterparts.

28.5 Conclusion

The influence of Sparta in North America has been visible in many areas of life ranging from politics and education to popular entertainment. The concentration on the classics in education in the colonial period created an educated class of political leaders who employed ancient Sparta as a model for the new American republic. The courage and discipline attributed to Sparta were appealing to men such as John Dickinson and Samuel Adams, while the harshness of the Lykourgan system was criticized by other leaders such as John Adams and Alexander Hamilton. In the first half of the nineteenth century, classical learning continued to thrive in the United States, conspicuously in the South where knowledge of the classics was seen as

characteristic of a southern gentleman. The Old South also looked to ancient Greece and Rome for parallels to its own political culture with its emphasis on the defense of slavery. However, Sparta's influence was limited as Athens was generally preferred by Southerners drawn to Athenian democracy and cultural achievements. Apologists of slavery throughout the antebellum period held up Sparta as an example of a successful slave-owning republic, while the famous abolitionist Lydia Marie Child referred to Sparta for the opposite conclusion. During the Civil War, Americans saw similarities between their terrible conflict and the Peloponnesian War. In this case, Sparta was equated with the South while the North was seen as a modern day Athens. Later, Americans would compare twentieth century conflicts with the Peloponnesian War. Political scientists and ancient historians saw many parallels between the antagonists of the Cold War and the Peloponnesian War. In most analyses, the Soviet Union was viewed as a modern-day Sparta since both societies were secretive and closed off from the wider world while also enjoying conservative, highly controlled economies.

In the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries, Sparta began to penetrate popular culture in new ways. Many college and high-school athletic teams both in the United States and Canada have adopted the Spartan hoplite as a spirited mascot. The last stand of Spartans at Thermopylai has been particularly influential in the American conception of self-sacrifice for liberty as far back as the colonial period. Finally, North Americans have emerged as some of the most important scholars of ancient Sparta, making notable contributions on the history of Spartan women and Spartan economy. Although Rome historically has had a greater influence on North America, ancient Sparta has left a major imprint that has been to a large extent interpreted depending on the concerns of the moment.

It is worth noting that throughout the course of American history Sparta has had particular appeal in times of social and political crisis. As discussed above, the influence of Sparta is noticeably visible in the early days of the formation of the United States, during the slavery debate, and the Cold War of the twentieth century. The revered stability and longevity of the Spartan social and political institutions seem to have offered comfort and hope for Americans in such times of drastic change and uncertainty. It did not matter whether the Sparta of John Adams, Thomas Roderick Dew, or the American Cold War warriors conformed to reality, but that the ancient city offered some insight to the course of human events. No matter one's view of Sparta, whether as a mixed constitution, slavery-practicing republic, or early totalitarian state, the city not only survived but thrived for centuries as a leading state in Greece. Sparta's resilience, in overcoming military crises such as the great Persian invasion, and also in withstanding the pressure for revolution so widespread in ancient Greece, has given hope to those of the modern era confronting similar challenges.

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FURTHER READING

There is a growing bibliography of works on the reception of the classical world in the United States. Reinhold 1984 and Richard 1994 and 2008 provide excellent accounts of the history of classical learning and influence on early America. Winterer 2002 also provides important evidence for late colonial and nineteenth century American reception of the classical world. The evolution of Spartan reception in the Antebellum South is a particularly rich field. Miles 1971 and Faust 1981 are fundamental for Southern views of the classical Greeks. Tritle 2006 and Hodkinson 2012 offer treatments of modern American views and influence of the Spartans particularly in a Cold War context. American scholarship on Sparta has been steadily advancing for the past few decades. Kagan 1969 still remains fundamental for many questions concerning the political and military history of classical Sparta while Kennell 1995 provides an important study of the social history of the ancient city. Finally, Pomeroy 2002 and Millender 1999 should be consulted for the important role of women in Spartan society.

NOTES

- 1 One only has to do a search on Google to see the enormously varied ways in which these lines from the film have been parodied; notable lines include “This is Sparta!” and “Spartans, tonight we dine in Hell!”
- 2 McDonald (1999) Letter 3; Richard (1994) 73.
- 3 See Reinhold (1984) 255–6 for a negative assessment of Sparta by Hamilton as early as 1782; Rahe (1992) 747; Richard (2008) 31.
- 4 See Adams (1787/1979) vol. 1. 257.
- 5 See Taylor R. et al. eds (1981) 102–3; Rahe (1992) 256.
- 6 See Richard (1994) 123–68 for a discussion of the history of mixed government theory and influence on the Founders.
- 7 Adams (1787/1979) vol. 1. 170.
- 8 Shapiro (2009) 321.
- 9 Adams (1787/1979) vol. 1. 171.
- 10 See *Federalist 18* in Shapiro (2009) 88–93.

- 11 Reinhold (1984) 214; Richard (2008) 79–84.
- 12 Taylor (1814/1969) 22–3.
- 13 Reinhold (1984) 184–5, 217–19; Winterer (2002) 62–5.
- 14 Miles (1971) 258–9; Winterer (2002) 21–2.
- 15 Miles (1971) 271; Rawson (1969) 369; Winterer (2002) 66.
- 16 Rawson (1969) 370; Miles (1971) 271.
- 17 See Winterer (2007) 169–77 for a summary of Child’s life and works.
- 18 Child (1836) 38; See Winterer (2007) 171.
- 19 Other communities named Sparta include: Sparta, Georgia; Sparta, Illinois; Sparta, Kentucky; Sparta, Michigan; Sparta, Missouri; and Sparta Township, Pennsylvania.
- 20 “Traditions.” msuspartans.com. Michigan State: Official Website of Spartan Athletics, 2010. Web. 28 February 2010; “About SJSU.” aboutsjsu.com, San Jose State., 2010. Web 28 February 2010.
- 21 See Clough (2004) 374–5 for a synopsis of the film.
- 22 Tritle in Meckler (2006) 128.
- 23 Tritle in Mickler (2006) 127–40; See Hodkinson (2012) for an excellent discussion on the influence of Thucydides on American political scientists and policy makers.
- 24 Tritle in Meckler (2006) 128; See Kagan (1969) 112–13.
- 25 See Hodkinson in Hodkinson and Morris (2012).
- 26 Tritle in Meckler (2006) 130.
- 27 Gilpin in Lebow and Strauss (1991) 31.
- 28 Bernstein in Hamilton and Krentz (1997) 275–6.
- 29 “National Infantry Association.” Infantryassn.com. National Infantry Association. Web. 14 March 2010.
- 30 See Huntington (1957) 465 for the comparison of West Point to Sparta.
- 31 J.A.O. Larsen (1932) “Sparta and the Ionian revolt, A Study of Spartan Foreign Policy and the Genesis of the Peloponnesian League”, *CPh* 2: 136–50; J.A.O. Larsen (1933) “The Constitution of the Peloponnesian League”, *CPh* 4: 257–76.

- 32 See M.I. Finley (1968) “Sparta”, in J.-P. Vernant ed., 143–60.
- 33 See D. Kagan (1969) *The Outbreak of the Peloponnesian War*. Ithaca.
- 34 See T.J. Figueira (1986) “Population Patterns in Late Archaic and Classical Sparta”, *TAPA* CXVI: 165–213 and T.J. Figueira (1999) “The Evolution of Messenian Identity”, in S. Hodkinson and A. Powell eds, 211–44; C. Hamilton (1991) *Agésilas and the Failure of Spartan Hegemony*. Ithaca; N. Kennell (1995) *Gymnasium of Virtue*. Chapel Hill and London.
- 35 See Pomeroy (1975) *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity*. New York.
- 36 See Millender (1999) “Athenian Ideology and the Empowered Spartan Woman”, in S. Hodkinson and A. Powell eds, 355–91.

CHAPTER 29

Sparta and the Imperial Schools of Britain: *Comparisons*

Anton Powell

The sacrificial honour code of [the British] officer corps, demanding displays of extreme physical courage (a social phenomenon as yet unexplored) ...

(Darwin (2012) 256)

[T]hey belonged to a class with a certain tradition, they had been to public schools where the duty of dying for your country, if necessary, is laid down as the first and greatest of the Commandments!

(Orwell (1968) [1941] 70)

It is not easy to estimate the degree in which the English people are indebted to these schools for the qualities on which they pique themselves most – for their capacity to govern others and control themselves, their aptitude for combining freedom with order, their public spirit, their vigour and manliness of character, their strong but not slavish respect for public opinion, their love of healthy sports and exercise. These schools have been the chief nurseries of our statesmen ... and they have had perhaps the largest share in moulding the character of an English gentleman.

(Report of the Royal Commission on Public Schools [the Clarendon Commission], London 1864, i.10.56)

[T]he easy indoctrination of the closed society.

(Tyerman (2000) 481)

When Xenophon wondered how Sparta, with its small population, had come to dominate the Greece of his day, he saw much of the explanation in Sparta's way of educating its young (*Lak. Pol.* 1–4). If today one asked a similar question about how, in spite of Britain's smallness, the English language has become the commonest language of travel, diplomacy, the internet (and much else), *part* of the answer might still resemble the judgement given in 1864 by the Earl of Clarendon's government-appointed Commission (above). The global ascendancy of the English language may seem to flow not only (and

obviously) from the potency of American and European technology, but in part from the way in which the elites of England and Scotland educated their own young in past centuries. That system of schooling helped to make possible the Anglophone global empire of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the blocking of challenges to it from speakers of French and German. The present chapter looks, in part, at how memories of Sparta influenced the educational system of the British ruling elite of that period. It may appear that one imperial system, that of the Spartans, was – through the medium of scholars, teachers (and of Plato and Plutarch) – effectively guiding and encouraging another, at a distance of over two millennia. It will be argued, however, that resemblances between the two systems went far beyond mere imitation, and arose largely – though not entirely – by coincidence, through similarity of social function. As a result, for the study of Sparta itself, a knowledge of what happened in British imperial schools may prove a rich source of hypotheses.

The present chapter is inevitably more a pioneering study than it is a survey of existing scholarship. Only one systematic comparison of the two systems is easy to find, ‘The Public School of Sparta’, by T. Rutherford Harley (1934), a brief but valuable article. Harley correctly observes that Sparta’s austere system was a response to the threat from the overwhelming numbers of unfree helots in Sparta’s homeland. He does not, however, say which group in Britain and the empire, according to his comparison, corresponded with the helots: that is, which group the Public Schools were designed to dominate. Perhaps the point needed no explanation at the time he wrote, or the matter was judged indelicate.

The British schools which at times looked for inspiration to Sparta did not call themselves ‘imperial’. They called themselves ‘public schools’, to advertise their accessibility to boys from far and wide. The term became the object of irony. A dictionary, compiled at the end of Victoria’s reign and published in 1902 (*Chambers’s Twentieth Century Dictionary of the English Language*, London and Edinburgh), defined the term thus: ‘Public school ... an endowed classical school for providing a liberal education for such as can pay high for it – Eton, Harrow, Rugby, Winchester, Westminster, Shrewsbury, Charterhouse, St. Paul’s and Merchant Taylors, &c.’ A full list would have been much longer and included, among many others, Downside, Marlborough, Radley, Repton, Sherborne, Uppingham. In Scotland were Fettes and Loretto and (founded later, in 1934) Gordonstoun. The name ‘Public School’ is now mainly used in scholarship – and in political controversy.

Present-day study of these schools is conditioned by political fact: all of the schools named above still exist, and all see their existence as enduringly threatened by opinion and government of the Left. From the eighteenth century to the present, most British prime ministers and countless other

leading politicians attended Public Schools (as we shall continue to call them), a fact in itself productive of controversy. In recent times, British governments, including those of the Right, have found the past global importance of the Public Schools an acutely inconvenient subject, potentially bad for foreign trade. To mention it at all may recall painfully such bygone boasts as the following, from a master at Harrow School:

The Public Schools, if they taught nothing else, would more than justify their existence by their teaching of this one lesson – Play the game. ... This small island race ... would [not] ever have attained to its unique position in the world – or have been such a great civilizing agency among backward races, if it had not learnt on its playing fields to carry on, though tired and exhausted, to act with fairness and not to be afraid to face responsibility.

(Mayo (1928) 196–7, quoted at Tyerman (2000) 466)

The conflicted, embarrassed, state of modern opinion affects serious study, and is productive of partisanship and self-censorship. For a scholar to suggest that the Public Schools were (let alone ‘are’) in any way a success is to invite accusation of elitism, or of imperialism. Terminology which expressed central values of the imperial schools is now shunned or derided: ‘pluck’ (courage), ‘funk’ (fear, cowardice), ‘blue funk’ (helpless terror), ‘owning up’ (confessing to authority), ‘playing the game’ (observing the informal rules), ‘keeping a straight bat’ (behaving honourably), ‘straight up and down the wicket’ (conventional and proper), ‘letting the side down’, ‘chaps’ and ‘gentlemen’, ‘cads’, ‘bounders’ and ‘rotters’. (We sense immediately the prominence, in Public School ethical language, of imagery from team games, which reflected a political aim: collectivism. Sparta’s unusual attachment to team games may be understood similarly.) But bygone language of the Public Schools is seldom analysed in the way that scholars dispassionately study any corresponding terms which survive from Sparta. The *Guardian* newspaper (of London) ran an editorial in 2013 (28 June) calling for the avoidance of all cricketing metaphors, because of their British imperial associations. (Metaphors from team games reflecting American global hegemony – ‘touch base’, ‘step up to the plate’, ‘whole new ball game’ – thrive internationally, and are currently subject to no such taboo.) Most modern writing about the Public Schools falls into one of three groups: books of serious historical survey with a sensationalist element; autobiographical memoirs by former pupils which tend to extremes, either celebratory or condemnatory; and publicity issued by the schools themselves which may omit or gloss over historical topics now found inconvenient. An aim of the present chapter is to confront material which remains controversial without evading or patronizing the past. Precisely because of the continuing sensitivity of the subject, the history of the imperial schools remains underdeveloped and promising.

This situation in our source material for British schools may itself

significantly resemble ancient Greek discourse about Sparta. Plato (in the *Republic* and *Laws*) and Aristotle (in the *Politics*) issued serious and occasionally sensationalizing criticism of Spartan education, while partisans such as the Athenians Kritias and Xenophon cried up Sparta's qualities, deploying (at least in Xenophon's case) a degree of evasion if not mendacity which recalls Sparta's own approach to the city's history. However, there is a crucial difference between the ancient and the modern sets of information. While detail from the Greek classical period concerning Sparta's education system is seriously lacking, modern information on the Public Schools is so plentiful that it can barely be mastered. Literature concerning a single school, albeit the most famous, and published over only a small part of its history – Eton, 1860–1900 – ‘fills several shelves’ (Honey (1977) 118). It is because of such modern abundance that we can hope to compare Sparta with Britain instructively. On many matters where we have little evidence about Sparta, there is a great deal of evidence about Britain. And it is not only the quantity of modern evidence which counts; its quality is such that much can be cross-checked and confirmed in detail. It emerges from our countless modern sources that there was indeed in Britain, as the Clarendon Commission claimed in the 1860s, a single system for the inculcation in privileged boys of what was called ‘character’. Public School ‘chaps’ were ‘moulded’ to a degree which recalls the claims of Sparta and its partisans concerning the *homoioi*, the ‘Similar’.

Critics and defenders of the Public Schools concur in applying to them the term ‘Spartan’; the usage is utterly commonplace. It is found from Victorian times (Rawson (1969) 363) to the present day (e.g. Hickson (1995) 40, 42, 80; Tyerman (2000) 216, 377). The comparison is sometimes detectable, fleeting and implicit, in modern scholarship concerning Greece: A.H.M. Jones in his book *Sparta* ((1967) 35–7) applied the vocabulary of Public Schools and English adult aristocracy (‘prefects’, ‘school fees’, ‘clubs’, ‘blackball’). For some, the comparison is almost to be dismissed as a thoughtless cliché. Elizabeth Rawson, in the best-known study of Sparta's reception down the ages, noted that the comparison was made by the Victorian philosophical writer Walter Pater, but she commented:

The now notorious comparison of public school and Spartan ways of life seems elsewhere hard to find until we reach the liberal opponents of both in quite recent years. The leading educationalists of the [Victorian] period do not, I think, turn to Sparta for precedent, though to Plato they may.

((1969) 363)

This seems to minimise the situation. For one thing, Plato's educational schemes were themselves extensively inspired by Sparta (Powell (1994)). Also, reference to Sparta in connection with British schools from the nineteenth to the twenty-first centuries is not only conspicuous but, at times,

highly positive. So, for example, on websites concerning two of the schools, consulted by the present writer almost at random. Marlborough College's official site describes conditions existing at the school around 1850 as 'extremely Spartan' (www.marlboroughcollege.org/about-us/college-history/first-fifty-years; consulted 10 December 2013). Gordonstoun's founder, Kurt Hahn, is described as inspired by ancient Greece: the head boy was styled 'Guardian' in imitation of Plato's *Republic* and the school's general regime 'could be described as Spartan' (www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gordonstoun; consulted 21 May 2014). Another Scottish Public School, Loretto, referred to itself, from the Victorian era, as Sparta in its Latin motto:

Spartam nactus es, hanc exorna.

Fortune has given you Sparta; do her credit.

Sedbergh, a Public School in a remote setting of NW England, used the same motto for a time in the late nineteenth century (Honey (1977) 221). Similar identification with Sparta became widespread in ambitious, though less socially exclusive, British schools. Thus King Edward VI Grammar School, Camp Hill (Birmingham) adopted the above motto, and Thames Valley Grammar School (founded in 1928) evoked Sparta elaborately in its school song:

Amid the Grecian mountains, where loud Eurotas rolled,
And lovely Lacedaimon the Spartan plain controlled,
Word of the poet came that stirred her youth aflame,
'You have Sparta for your birthplace, do honour to her name.'
Hanc exorna! etc.

29.1 The Role of Thomas Arnold: A British Lykourgos?

That British identification with Sparta went wide is clear. How deep it went is a different question. The word 'spartan', with a lower-case initial, might be used unreflectingly to mean no more than primitive or poor, as of accommodation and food. But often the term, as used with a capital initial, evoked a moral programme – one which, of course, intimately included harsh physical conditions. And here reference to the Sparta of history (and of pseudo-history) might be elaborate and highly ambitious. At the heart, if not at the root, of the resemblance between Sparta and British elite education was one man; and it is quite possible that he was inspired to believe in his mission by Sparta's self-image, as relayed above all by Plato and Plutarch. Spartan

story offered the supposed precedent of a single lawgiver who had, with the aid of religion, succeeded in establishing an all-conquering system of education. The British counterpart of Lykourgos was Dr Thomas Arnold (1795–1842). Unlike Lykourgos, Arnold certainly existed. Like Lykourgos, Arnold became the subject of a historical vortex, with a series of evolving reforms being attributed to him for which in reality others were largely or wholly responsible (Mangan (1981) 16–17; Copley (2002) 150). In Arnold's case, his influence was passed on by former pupils and associates of his who became reforming headmasters elsewhere, such as C.J. Vaughan at Harrow and G.E.C. Cotton at Marlborough (Honey (1977) 118, 299; Tyerman (2000) 248–9; Copley (2002) 178).

Arnold was a historian of Greece, editor of Thucydides' history; institutionally speaking, he was a minister of the Anglican church and, briefly before his early death, Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford (1841–42). His chief platform, however, for national (indeed empire-wide) influence was his fourteen-year rule as headmaster of Rugby Public School (1828–42). Before his arrival the school had been a far-from-glorious institution in an undistinguished Midland town. Challenged by Rugby school to a cricket match, the captain of the Eton team had supposedly replied, 'Rugby, Rugby...? Well, we'll think about it if you'll tell me where it is.' (Honey (1977) 239). After Arnold, this was to change. Some immediate idea of the potency of Arnold's reputation as reformer, and the international significance of the reforming Public Schools which he shaped, may be gained from the worldwide export from Britain of team games, and notably the game named after Arnold's school: rugby football. This sport, a highly-codified system of running and brawling now widespread in the territories of the former British empire and in western Europe (and also in the United States, under another name and with its own locally-designed nineteenth-century code), was formalized and given detailed rules under the influence of Arnold's school, though after his time as headmaster.

Team sport (as distinct from the normal Greek athletic contests between *individuals*, as at the Olympic and other pan-Greek festivals) itself had Spartan precedents: Xenophon referred in the classical period to teams picked for a game of ball at Sparta (*Lak. Pol.* 9.5); Pausanias, some five centuries later, wrote of a brawling free-for-all game between Spartan teams, which took place at the Platanistas (3.14). Arnold's successors, however, were not aiming to reproduce Spartan forms exactly, but to apply and adjust pre-existing British (and on occasion American) practices to evolving local needs. A rough manly game requiring physical courage and fitness but also teamwork and a measure of restraint might serve imperial requirements. The less violent, and even more internationally pervasive game of Association Football ('soccer', as distinct from 'rugger'; the *-er* termination was a favourite in Public School slang)¹, would be invented (or rather gentled and codified out

of traditional mauls of kicking) in part by an Old Boy of Harrow School, C.W. Alcock (Tyerman (2000) 271), who also founded international cricket matches.²

Scholars seem not to have found in Arnold's extensive writings any explicit reference to Sparta as a source of inspiration (Rawson (1969) 363). We are faced with a paradox, identified by one of the most astute recent historians of the Public Schools, J.R. de S. Honey. Honey perceived the marked resemblance between Sparta and the Public Schools, and found it 'amazing' that so few apologists of the British schools in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries referred to Sparta in their public rhetoric (Honey (1977) 221). Arnold did write, however, that his intention was to 'sophronize' the boys of Rugby (Honey (1977) 7, 15). Here he was virtually using code, comprehensible only to a classically-educated few. The word 'sophronize' was not regular English. (It does not, for example, appear in the late-Victorian dictionary quoted above.) For historians of classical Greece, and especially to students of Thucydides such as Arnold himself, the meaning might be clear enough. The Greek *sōphrōn* and its cognates suggested oligarchic rule, and especially the regime of Sparta, the supreme model of *sōphrosunē* (Thuc.8.24, 64). Plutarch in his *Life of Lykourgos* (ch. 14) used the verb employed by Arnold to refer to the Spartan lawgiver's attempts to reform, to 'sophronize', the women of his community.

Plato learned from Sparta, and was to pass on *at second hand* to Arnold, the idea that a very small community ('a little commonwealth' in Arnold's reported view: Honey (1977) 10), by isolating its most unruly and unpromising element – boys, youths and young men – and by subjecting them to intense and unusual discipline, physical and moral, could turn them into a unified, obedient and irresistible ruling group. For Plato, as for Sparta, human nature was plastic. He wrote, 'You can convince the souls of the young of anything you try to' (*Laws* 663e–664a; Powell (1994) 279), and ironically imagined himself accused of creating imaginary constitutions as facilely as one might work warm wax (*Laws* 746a). That was not normal Greek thinking: Athenians prided themselves on fixed, ancient qualities born from their native soil. Spartans, in contrast, did not see themselves as an autochthonous community. They had arrived in Laconia by invasion, had suffered a rare degree of turbulence and revolution, and had triumphantly reinvented themselves under Lykourgos, emerging as 'tamers of humans' (*damasimbrotos*: Simonides 218), with a system of education uniquely capable of harnessing and directing males otherwise potentially vicious and corrupt. The image of Sparta's plasticity lent itself, in Britain, as in other European cultures of modern times (see [Chapter 26](#) by Mason and [Chapter 27](#) by Rebenich in this volume), to drastic educational and political reform. But the 'amazing' scarcity which Honey identified, of explicit references to Sparta by educational authorities of the imperial period, has still to be accounted for.

Part of the explanation for it is, that many – though not all – classicists who might have been expected to make the comparison were not well informed about Sparta. Their focus rather was on the literary texts of Athens (and, to a much lesser extent, on the later moralizing of Plutarch), rather than on the anthropology of bookless Sparta. One influential classicist and Public School headmaster, Cyril Norwood, could write (in 1929), ‘the Greeks had no team spirit’ (quoted at Tyerman (2000) 467), ignoring the evidence of Xenophon and Pausanias on Sparta. Writing and reading the Greek dialect of Athens was, until recently, the primary aim of the Public School Hellenist. As late as the 1970s one young graduate of a Public School, admirably competent in the writing of Attic Greek, on being necessarily reminded that the Spartans too were Greeks, replied thoughtfully, ‘Yes, I suppose they were.’

Arnold would follow Plato and Sparta in his efforts to insulate his community from certain information. Rather as Plato excluded poets from his imaginary Republic and historical Sparta frowned on book-learning, Arnold succeeded in having newspapers whose politics he deplored banned from the local public library: the Tory *Times* of London was among them. Scholastic learning itself should respect certain limits. (We are reminded of Plutarch’s description of Sparta’s teaching literacy to its young only ‘as far as was necessary’: *Life of Lykourgos*, 16). For example, the teaching of science at Rugby was to be excluded. Boys should not learn to speak French well, but should learn it ‘grammatically as a dead language’. Here was another form of cultural insulation, recalling classical Sparta’s attempted shielding of its citizens from foreign contacts and influences: republican and turbulent France might even be feared as the democratic Athens of contemporary Europe. The Greek and Latin languages were to be the formal heart of Arnold’s curriculum. More important for Arnold, however, was an informal purpose: the inculcation, with the Christian religion, of a certain morality, what became known widely – and somewhat evasively – in the Public School system as ‘character’ (Honey (1977) 210, 223–4). The ‘character’ required would evolve: the cult of sporting manliness, for example, reached its height after Arnold’s time, in the late nineteenth century. He himself seems not to have preached the ethic of team games, of ‘muscular Christianity’ as it became. Insistence on Christianity would become less intense in the schools of the twentieth century. But the belief that boarding schools could, indeed should, impose character would survive, arguably to the present day.

Sparta had insisted that boys should at all possible times be supervised by adults, a point made clear by Xenophon (*Lak. Pol.* 2.10–11). Plato enthusiastically echoed the idea in his *Laws* (942; Powell (1994) 273–4): life should be lived as far as possible in common, in a crowd, synchronized and under authority. Roaming and playing free were not to be permitted. Arnold and his successors moved towards a similar discipline. And, as in Xenophon’s picture of Sparta, where an adult male could not be present to supervise, a

chosen youth was put in control (*Lak. Pol.* 2.11). Arnold intensified the role given to the oldest boys, those in their late teens, to act as role-models, supervisors and punishers of their juniors (Honey (1977) 11). These were his 'Praepostors'. Conceived as the headmaster's moral agents, they came to be imitated almost universally in other Public Schools; more commonly known as 'Prefects', they regularly were given the power to cane (Tyerman (2000) 479 for statistics concerning such whipping in the twentieth century). In this they resembled the selected young *mastigophoroi* ('whip-bearers') of Sparta (Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 2.2). The practice was copied in Prep(aratory) Schools, the junior version of Public Schools for boys aged from eight (or even younger). Far more widely in Britain and its empire, in the state-funded academic Grammar Schools for boys between the ages of eleven and eighteen, Arnold's system was imitated to the extent that Prefects (aged sixteen to nineteen) had until the late twentieth century the right to identify and detain young miscreants (in 'Prefects' Detention'; known at the present writer's Grammar School until the late 1960s as 'priggies' book'), though not to cane. Arnold's method of supervision throughout the day was intensified and became the norm in Public Schools, where a technical term for it was 'mapping-out' (Honey (1977) 175; Hickson (1995) 39, 46). Xenophon (*Lak. Pol.* 2.2) had written that Sparta was exceptional among Greek states in insisting that the education of boys be controlled not by slave *paidagōgoi* but by a citizen of high standing, the *paidonomos* (literally, 'boy-herd'). Arnold at Rugby improved the conditions and elevated the status of Assistant Masters; at Harrow his ex-pupil Vaughan did likewise. Only in the mid-nineteenth century did it become normal in Public Schools for teachers not to be 'ushers' of low status but 'gentlemen', a transition designed to give the masters more respect from, and thus more control over, the boys – whose own parents were in most cases wealthy and sometimes aristocrats.

Arnold's system, with continuing adjustments, became the pervasive model for Public Schools in Britain, from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century (and beyond). Not only were his former pupils and other associates of Rugby eagerly sought as headmasters elsewhere in Britain; his methods were imitated in other countries, notably in territories of the (former) British empire. Respectful outsiders to the Spartan system, such as the Athenian Xenophon or the conquering Pyrrhos of Epirus, might think of sending their own sons to be schooled at Sparta. Respectful outsiders would do likewise with the British Public Schools, for more than a century. An Ashanti prince came from West Africa (Honey (1977) 67). So did sons of Indian princes, and a boy who would become independent India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. Eminent Nazis were similarly impressed, and thought of enrolling their sons en masse after Britain had been safely conquered (though not at Eton, where the waiting-list was thought too long). Joachim von Ribbentrop, as Hitler's ambassador in London, enrolled his son at Westminster. In recent years the children of Russian oligarchs have been discreetly welcomed to the

system. By the late nineteenth century there had developed an education network of exceptional potency. Its structural similarity to what we know of Spartan schooling is so elaborate that it is difficult to summarize. But we must try.

British Public Schools, and their Prep Schools, took in boys of wealthy families as boarders from the ages (approximately) of eight to nineteen, thereby removing them – as Sparta had done – to a large extent from the influence of family. To these boys was given a homogeneous education involving, as in classical and Roman Sparta, austere physical conditions and a morality imposed in part by the cane or the whip. Academic and literary education at the Public Schools, while far in advance of anything we hear of from classical Sparta, was – as at Sparta – deliberately limited in the interests of character-formation. In both systems, intensely competitive sports involved much violence: for example, the same type of cricket ball, hard, heavy and dangerous, was used in Britain for small boys as for adults. (For death by cricket ball at Harrow in 1871, Tyerman (2000) 343.) In the Public Schools as at Sparta, there was pervasive insistence on the need for physical courage and on the willingness to die in battle for the sake of the community. Hierarchy was elaborate. Fear had been treated as a god at Sparta: *Phobos* had its shrine, and fear structured the community, fear of divine punishment, of the city's authorities, and of unified public opinion. Fear of punishment pervaded the Public Schools (Gagnier (1988) 28, 34): a former pupil of Arnold's Rugby described how the boys 'feared the Doctor with all our hearts ... and the public opinion of boys in our daily life above the laws of God' (Hughes (1857) ch. 7). Or, as another of Arnold's ex-pupils put it, 'the boys at Rugby ... were ruled by high respect and by fear and by fear [*sic*]. Arnold was to them Black Tom, as he was called' (Copley (2002) 257). Religion was prominently used, as by Arnold and later headmasters in their priestly capacity, to cement discipline. Sermons by the headmaster from the pulpit were intense experiences, long remembered (Honey (1977) 313–14). At Sparta the kings were priests and controlled information from the most influential shrine, Delphi; at the British Public Schools of the late nineteenth century most headmasters were in Holy Orders. Pederasty, as we shall see, was so widespread as to structure each society, albeit in very different ways.

If we are committed students of the Greek world, we may be slightly biased towards the idea that the noblest warrior state of Antiquity has had mighty influence on modern civilization. That idea should, however, be examined sceptically. *Within* the Public Schools, the ideal (found in Plutarch's Lykourgos, ch. 18) of the brave Spartan boy who silently endured while a fox fatally gnawed his belly might offer children a role-model in a way that biblical Christianity did not: the child as hero. (The corresponding Christian idea, 'little lord Jesus no crying he makes', seems to have been an invention of a hymnist in the late nineteenth century; it may even have been a reaction

to the pagan ideal of the Spartan boy, altogether more inspiring to unreconstructed young males.) Certainly the story of boy and fox became widely known in Britain. The novelist Henry Williamson, educated in Edwardian England, expected readers of his novel *A Fox Under my Cloak* (1955) to understand the reference. In Germany this story, and the associated morality of extreme physical endurance, pervaded the military cadet schools of the nineteenth century and later, to an extraordinary extent. The boy cadets used their own verb for heroic resistance to pain, *spartanern*. German public figures, especially those on the conservative or radical Right, were outspoken in their approving references to Sparta as an educational model (Roche 2013a; Rebenich, this volume, [Chapter 27](#)). But in *public* discourse in Britain enthusiasm for Sparta may have been more guarded, perhaps reflecting a more intense Christianity in British as compared with German pedagogy.

Arnold himself, we have seen, could be cryptic in referring to his imitation of Greek models. Now, if it was the case that evocation of (pagan) Sparta was expected not to resonate widely and favourably with the publicly and insistently Christian audiences of Victorian and Edwardian Britain, it is unlikely that a wish to imitate Sparta would guide the prosperous parents of the age in decisions about how their own children should be educated. It seems, rather, that there was some divergence between parents and educational authorities. Parents were described by educational authorities as ‘the greatest obstacle to progress’ (Mangan (1981) 132–4). One extreme view reported from Marlborough was that ‘parents are the last people who ought to be allowed to have children’ (Honey (1977) 149–50). Such views recall Plato, who had lamented the variety of character transmitted by parents to their offspring (*Laws* 788a–b). Professional educators may have found in Sparta (or in Plato’s modified versions of Sparta) a source of ideas and a legitimating precedent. But for them to have succeeded, as they did, in constructing a Sparta-like system across Britain and much of its empire, that system must have been seen as meeting widely perceived needs of the age. A similar, indeed stronger, logic applies to the Spartans’ original establishment of their own austere system, since Spartans – unlike Arnold and his followers – probably had no encouraging Greek precedent to fortify them. The fact that Sparta and the Public Schools show such similarity may have arisen less from the erudite hellenizing of classically-educated headmasters such as Dr Arnold than from structural resemblances in the two societies, the Spartan and the British.

Ideals expressed, and especially those which are energetically pursued, tend to be generated by what are perceived as serious problems. When imperial Rome preached on coinage the ‘good faith’ or ‘harmony’ of the armies, it was because in reality the legions were disobeying the central authority or at each others’ throats; when modern French politicians urge *rassemblement*, they are seeking to solve acute disunity. Sparta’s energetically-pursued ideal of

harmony and austerity was generated by memories of a Sparta riven by extremes of luxury and poverty. Classical Sparta unified in obedience to its law, or rather to its authorities and their shifting ways of imposing order, was the product of an archaic Sparta remembered as the scene of some of the longest and most intense disorder of any Greek city (Powell, this work, [Chapter 1](#)). Spartan discipline, in short, was the product of well-grounded fear that events of an appalling past might recur. With the Public Schools of Britain the case was strikingly similar.

29.2 Indiscipline and Fear of Revolution

There were Public Schools before Arnold. They had in common with the Arnoldian schools not only many of their sites and a somewhat classical subject-matter, but also the fact that they provided boarding for boys of wealthy family. But by the early nineteenth century the existence of these schools was in several cases threatened, by low numbers and shortage of income (Tyerman (2000) 226, 246), but ultimately by disorder and public disapproval (Honey (1977) 1). The boys frequently lived in anarchy and violence of their own making (Tyerman (2000) 172–4). In 1845, Harrow School ‘was close to extinction; the few remaining boys so riotous and vicious that the new Head was advised to sack the lot of them and begin again’ (Tyerman (2000) 245). Their masters had little authority over them and were indeed subject to physical attack. At Westminster, the young Lord March is recorded as having set his master’s hair alight, and then been obliged – in extinguishing the fire – to beat the poor man’s ears. The masters responded by keeping their distance, refusing to intervene in cases of misbehaviour which might reveal their own powerlessness. A poet, William Cowper, in 1784, addressed the masters thus:

But ye connive at what ye cannot cure,
And evils, not to be endured, endure,
Lest power exerted, but without success,
Should make the little ye retain still less.

(From *Tirocinium, or, A review of schools*)

Cowper’s long poem of protest against the Public School system of the eighteenth century can be read as symptomatic of a widespread public revulsion, which by the 1830s would become part of an irresistible movement against public violence, theft, drunkenness and whoring – in short the movement commonly known as Victorian. Arnold’s problem was, as a recent

analyst has noted, to 'save the schools ... of the aristocracy from the taunts and outrage of the middle class' (Tyerman (2000) 248–50). And, just as Public Schools predated Arnold, so 'Victorianism' was much older than Queen Victoria (whose reign began in 1837).

In England as at Sparta alarm at disorder within the aristocracy was driven by something more urgent than puritanical morality and educational ideals: fear of revolution (Honey (1977) 3–4 for this fear in Arnold). Rebelliousness among Public School pupils was a main driver of reforms at the schools, in the first half of the nineteenth century (Honey (1977) 194). Where violent disaffection might lead, when the poor were led by men of some education, was clear to all after the French revolution of 1789 and particularly after the Terror of 1793–4 in Paris and the provinces, with its generalized beheadings. In revolutionary France, as in revolutionary England of the seventeenth century, the wealthy and educated classes had – crucially – been divided. Some of the eminent rich had taken the side of the excluded. Among Charles I's parliamentarian enemies of the 1640s was the Earl of Manchester; in France of the early 1790s one of the richest aristocrats of all, the Duc d'Orléans, reinvented himself as citizen Philippe Egalité. Fear of division, of subversion from within led by men with intimate knowledge of the ruling system's weaknesses, is evident at Sparta and was no doubt widespread in England in the age when the Public Schools were reformed. At Sparta the state's most eminent general of his day, the regent Pausanias, was accused of having (c.470 BC) conspired with the helots in revolutionary schemes (this work, [Chapter 11](#)). Whether or not the accusation was true (as Thucydides believed it to be), it shows what was widely feared. In England, Cowper's symptomatic protest against the Public Schools was no inarticulate howl from the social depths: it was a learned and highly-wrought work of literature, designed to appeal to an educated public and written by a former pupil of Westminster School. It was from such sources that leadership for the feared political revolution, or for some profound reform, might come.

If revolutionary movements were to be avoided, it might well be thought, in England as at Sparta (where the corresponding terror for the aristocracy of the sixth century was the general Greek movement towards tyranny), that the wealthy had better act with discipline and in unity. And yet the English places of aristocratic education threatened the opposite. Not only was there much individual disobedience in the form of violence, drunkenness (and the manufacture of alcohol), whoring, pederasty and theft, in some cases there was organized rebellion. The masters were at times excluded by force from the boys' domain. Such exclusions were also familiar at the other end of the social scale: in Victorian cities there existed citadels of criminal life, where the police dared not penetrate: they were known as 'rookeries' (Chesney (1970) ch. 4). In the case of the Public Schools, the exclusion of masters by boys also had a name, 'barring-out' (e.g. Edgeworth (1796)), and was

remembered into the twentieth century (see [Figure 29.1](#)).



"And you can tell old Quelchy to go and eat coke, Wharton!"

Figure 29.1 Billy Bunter bars his study against authority.

(From *Billy Bunter and the School Rebellion* (1967), first published in 1928 in the boys' magazine *The Magnet*).

Collective rebellions of this sort happened at Rugby in the decades before Arnold's arrival (Copley (2002) 63–4). Similar events occurred at Harrow, where boys blocked with chains the road to London, to prevent communication with their parents; the headmaster anxiously searched the boys' rooms for gunpowder (Tyerman (2000) 197). Eton and Winchester pupils were notorious for their insurgency: in 1818 senior boys at Winchester defied a magistrate and the constabulary, and were only suppressed by the militia (Honey (1977) 6). The age of rebellions lasted from the 1770s until the end of the nineteenth century, when boys at the Leys School, Cambridge, allegedly succeeded in driving away mounted police (Honey (1977) 107–8). The most famous (though perhaps not the most serious) rebellion happened a few years after Arnold's death: at Marlborough in 1851 boys took control of school buildings for about a week and set off a series of explosions (Honey (1977) 41). Harrow boys, in particular, had supported radical, indeed republican, causes in the late Georgian era (Tyerman (2000) 198–9). It must have been evident to many in authority that such attitudes, such techniques, might come to be employed on a national scale, in a political context, perhaps with the same confident young men as leaders. In 1873, during a rebellion at King's School Canterbury, boys sang the *Marseillaise* (Honey (1977) 106). Might they not one day league themselves, as in France, with the rebellious poor, England's counterpart to the helots? Or might they even – the worst of cases – seek to ally with a foreign republican regime, with France, the perennial enemy?

Counter-measures from the authorities were to be expected, and they would need to be of a force and sophistication to overcome the anarchic energy and initiative of the young. Fear, we have seen, was an effective instrument at Sparta as in the Public Schools. For Spartans, there was fear of the Olympian gods: disasters such as helot revolt or earthquake were seen as divine punishment for the Spartans' own failings. The objects of fear in daily life were, for the young, the whip (administered 'severely', Xenophon makes clear (*Lak. Pol.* 2)); for adults, there was humiliation as a result of misconduct in battle or of other subtler, failings; and for all there was the dread of concentrated rejection by a united social opinion. For pupils at Public Schools of Britain, religion offered additional terrors, concerning the afterlife. We have seen that Thomas Hughes, former pupil of Arnold at Rugby, wrote that fear of schoolfellows' bad opinion eclipsed the terrors of the Christian religion. His point was intended to be paradoxical: those religious terrors were in any case, his readers might assume, intense, but at Rugby social opinion was more frightening still. And then there was the whip – or, rather, the cane.

29.3 Flogging, Pederasty – and Boys in Love

Autobiographic literature about caning and flogging at Public Schools is abundant, moving – and instructive about the case of Sparta. The whipping at the British schools was knowingly graded in severity, and in the degree of publicity accorded. It might, at the extreme, involve dozens of violent blows administered before other boys, if not a whole school assembled for the instructive spectacle. Flogged boys might afterwards need days of absence in bed, to recover. Some deaths are recorded (Honey (1977) 200). Although other boys were recruited at times as ‘holders-down’ of the squirming victim, there was – beforehand – frequently an insistence on voluntary submission. The condemned boy might have, theoretically, the choice not to be flogged, but to be expelled – or to withdraw himself – from the school. The fact that a majority chose to remain and be flogged confirms the psychological *possibility* of the endurance recorded of Spartan boys. In Britain as in Sparta, a boy’s reputation for manliness was at stake. (‘Take down your breeches like a man!’, was reportedly a Victorian dictum (Honey (1977) 212).) The deaths in the British system likewise help to make believable Plutarch’s claim personally to have seen boys dying under the lash at the Spartan festival of Orthia (Life of Lykourgos, 18).

Experienced observers and sufferers at the British schools might analyse the beatings with precision. One regular officiant at the punishment later wrote:

The swishing was given with the master’s full strength and it took only two or three strokes for drops of blood to form everywhere and it continued for 15 or 20 strokes when the wretched boy’s bottom was a mass of blood. Generally, of course, the boys endured it with fortitude ...

(Quoted at Honey (1977) 198)

Noteworthy are the words ‘of course’, and also the fact that this account concerns a Prep School, for boys of thirteen and under. A seasoned victim at another Prep School wrote, of his own suffering,

I remember that it was at about the 15th blow that it really began to hurt and from thence the pain increased in geometrical progression. At about the 28th blow one began to howl. The largest number of smacks I ever received was I think 42.

(Quoted at Honey (1977) 198–9)

A.A. Milne, long remembered as the author of innocent childhood tales such as *Winnie the Pooh*, also described, from his experience as a pupil at Westminster, the ‘ever-present threat of tanning by prefects’. The chief problem, he wrote, was ‘not the actual pain, but the perpetual fear of it’ (Honey (1977) 199).

In our own times, there is little inclination to look for anything positive in the regular infliction of severe pain. We are thus ill-equipped to understand why Sparta, and the Public Schools, persisted in the practice. Leslie Stephen

(father of Virginia Woolf) was describing the Public Schools he knew, but could equally have been describing the ritual whipping of young Spartans at Orthia's shrine, when he wrote:

[T]o be flogged in accordance with traditions handed down from hoar antiquity, and embodied in special local jargon, is to have gone through a sacred initiatory rite.

(*Cornhill Magazine*, March 1873, quoted at Honey (1977) 284)

Stephen, once of Eton, was writing in long retrospect. But at the Public Schools, as at Sparta, the old with their selective memories had extraordinary influence in defending traditions of their choice.

Both Sparta and the imperial Public Schools were believed by their contemporaries to be intensely given to pederasty. (Pederasty involving Public School masters was perhaps seen as less of a threat, although it presumably was part of the explanation for so much whipping of boys' bare bottoms.) At Sparta pederastic love (like the whipping of the young) was formalized: it was normal for a young man to form a recognized couple with a teenaged boy. Xenophon in his eulogy of the Spartan system claims that such couples enabled the transmission of correct social values from the elder to the younger male. He denies that obvious lust for a boy's body was permitted at Sparta, but with revealing candour admits that he is 'not surprised that some people do not believe this' (*Lak. Pol.* 2.13–14). The comparison with the Public Schools is complex and interesting. Before Arnold, 'vice' – as it was termed, with deliberate vagueness – had evidently flourished in the largely unsupervised colonies – and officially-shared beds – of boys at boarding school. Arnold himself wrote:

None can pass through a large school without being pretty intimately acquainted with vice; and few, alas! very few, without tasting too largely of that poisoned bowl.

(Quoted at Hickson (1995) 20)

Almost certainly part of Arnold's motive in intensifying the prefect system was to exploit the insight of older boys in the effort to repress sexual behaviour. After his time, and notably after 1859 when there was something of a national panic in Britain about sex in boarding schools (Hickson (1995) 51; Tyerman (2000) 272), anti-sexual efforts by the school authorities structured boys' lives. Commonly, boys were forbidden to speak to each other unless they belonged to the same 'house' (a residential unit within the school, used as a basis for 'inter-house' competition, especially in sport). Informal conversation between older and younger boys became a punishable offence (Honey (1977) 183). Sleeping arrangements now involved meticulous segregation and sometimes physical traps were set to detect illicit journeying between beds. Masters patrolled silently (and boys set up their counter-

intelligence system: watchers who called 'Cave!' as the enemy approached). Offenders were liable to be flogged and then expelled, both processes being staged as spectacles to teach and intimidate the majority. Much of what is seen as 'Spartan' about the boarding schools – the cold showers, the intensive athletics for all, the meagre diet, the planning and policing of every moment of the waking day (Hickson (1995) 23, 39, 46–7) – was justified *in part* as directing the boys' energies and thoughts away from sex. In this way the 'Spartan' schools of Britain may seem decidedly un-Spartan in their motivation.

The gulf – real but easy to overestimate – between Spartan and Public School practice flowed in part from religion. The three widespread religions of modern times which claim descent from the Old Testament, Christianity, Islam and Judaism, share a horror of sexual sin, indeed may privilege sexual offences as worse than almost all others. In contrast, the three most revered and supposedly potent gods of the Hellenic world were conceived as accomplished rapists: Zeus, Poseidon and Apollo. Sparta's cherished figures of local myth were little better: the Dioskouroi (Castor and Pollux) were rapists, and Helen an adulteress. The casualness with which sexual promiscuity on the part of free males might be regarded in Antiquity was largely impossible among adults in the mainstream of nineteenth-century Public School muscular Christianity. Significant dissident voices were, however, heard.

George Cotton, formerly a teacher at Rugby under Arnold and a future Bishop, as reforming headmaster of Marlborough preached that friendships 'especially between an older and a younger boy' might be beneficial (Honey (1977) 186). Arnold himself had apparently encouraged the practice (Honey (1977) 186). More boldly, an Old Etonian wrote publicly (in 1882) that the horrors of pederastic friendships had been exaggerated, citing the case of a peer, indeed Lord Lieutenant of a county (and so, by implication, a sound chap), who was none the worse for his involvement in such routine Public School activity:

Every old public school boy knows what is meant by 'spooning' [sexual infatuation and courtship] ... It exists in all large schools ... A friend of mine, a peer, the Lord Lieutenant of his county ... [etc.] ... told me that when he was at school he was 'taken up' (as it is called) by boys bigger than himself, and petted – he supposed because of his good looks; that before he received such notice he was an 'untidy, slovenly little ruffian', and that he dated his conversion to gentlemanly habits and refined manners from the time when he was so patronised.

(Journal of Education, March 1882, 86, cited at Honey (1977) 181)

The writer in question, by emphasizing the existence within the Public Schools of technical terms for pederasty, was driving home his point that such

sexuality was widespread (without, by implication, having ruined those institutions). His further point that erotically-based friendships could actually be beneficial *by the standards of conventional morality* recalls Xenophon's account of Spartan male couples, and the Spartans' own technical term for the older member of such couples, the 'inspirer' (*eisprēlas*: Cartledge (2001) 97 and esp. 208 n. 18). Explicit reference to Spartan homoeroticism as desirable cement for a military unit is made in recent times, by an eminent surgeon describing his own attitude as a Public School boy under the embattled British empire of 1939–40:

I quite early acquired the idea that male comradeship was superior to heterosexual love as a result of receiving a good classical education and perhaps because in 1939 and 1940 we were in pretty desperate straits. The example of the Sacred Band [a Theban homoerotic battalion] ..., never mind the general ethos of the Spartans, was very much on our minds.

(John Gleave, once of Uppingham School, quoted in Hickson, (1995) 196)

More widespread perhaps, though not commonly related to Sparta, were the warm and close relations between certain Public School teachers and the boys in their care. Several such are recorded in detail by Hickson ((1995) ch. 2), by implication as sexualized but seemingly not involving unambiguously sexual contact. If indeed these were often cases of repressed sexual desire on the master's side, the evidence of enduring respect and gratitude on the part of the boys involved, once they had become adults, suggests that Xenophon's account concerning Spartan male couples and the educational value of repressed pederasty may not be wholly unrealistic. Arnold had taken an influential lead in seeking to socialize boys by breaking down the gulf between them and their schoolmasters. There were to be, it was hoped, no more colonies of contemptuous young, impermeable to adult values, no more – to use our own slang – 'Planet Boy'. As part of his programme to 'sophronize' the young, Arnold regularly invited his pupils to tea with his family. With some masters such intimacy might turn to sexual love: Arnold's former pupil C.J. Vaughan was forced out from the headship of Harrow (in 1859) by love-letters he had written to a senior boy. Vaughan was profoundly respected, and kindly remembered, as a headmaster who had, in general, benefited his pupils (Tyerman (2000) 277–83).

The urgent desire, especially from the 1860s, to repress erotic behaviour by boys at Public Schools may help to understand the paradox noted earlier: that the schools resembled Sparta and yet public references to Sparta by defenders of the schools were rather infrequent. School headmasters of the late nineteenth century, were – by an overwhelming majority – classicists (statistics at Mangan (1981) 288 n. 63). They would be well aware that homoerotic themes, and indeed values, were prominent in classical (and especially in Greek) literature. Arnold himself, an admirer of Plato, would

have known the *Symposium* where not only do homosexual themes abound but supreme intellectual wisdom is even described at one point as attainable through ‘the correct use of pederasty’ (211b). A majority in society knew too little about Sparta to be enthused by evocations of it; and the minority who did know might have decidedly mixed, or negative, feelings about the lusty paganism of Laconia. Any who revered the Spartan education system had good reason to express their enthusiasm guardedly if at all.

The widespread anxiety of our own age concerning sexual activity and children tends to take a different form from the Victorian, focusing on predation of children by adults. This focus may tend to obscure in our own day two things which Victorian school authorities, like the Spartans before them, were well placed to understand: that sexual contact *between* the young may be much more common than that involving adult and child, and that much of it is wholly voluntary (Hickson (1995) ch. 3). Memoirs from the Public Schools refer often to ‘crushes’, ‘pashes’ and ‘grand pashes’: the vocabulary for such passionate attachments was (and continues to be) rich and revealing (Hickson (1995) 216–20 provides a glossary of such terms). The terminology varied between schools and thus suggests that the behaviour in question was observed directly and independently rather than being mainly a matter of hearsay from the wider culture. At the Public Schools, as at Sparta, these attachments were promoted by the structure of children’s lives. Athleticism at the mid-to-late Victorian schools (as at Sparta), far from repressing lust through physical preoccupation and exhaustion, may have engendered (as among professional athletes today) an unusually high level of animal spirits. If the boys were to be in a state to learn effectively in class, they could not be kept permanently weary. The intense value conferred at the Public Schools, as at Sparta, on athletic prowess in senior boys will have encouraged worship of them, and their bodies, by younger ones. (For Spartan *girls* shown sympathetically in local poetry as close to worshipping beautiful older girls, Calame, this work, [Chapter 7](#)) Similarly impressive, no doubt, was the sheer power possessed by prefects (as by the elite of whip-bearing young men who policed children at Sparta). It was only to be expected that sometimes a younger boy might be smitten with desire by the presence of a ‘blood’, a ‘swell’ or a ‘god’. Again such terms are richly revealing.

Recent testimony from the Public School of Loretto, the self-proclaimed Sparta of Scotland, reveals the social question confronting segregated, single-sex communities of the very young. A former pupil of the school published in 2001 his account of being seduced at the school, decades earlier and at the age of twelve, by a charismatic young teacher (named). In accordance with the adult values prevailing at the time of publication, the writer testified dramatically (and to the criminal justice system) about his victimization by a predatory adult in authority: ‘I was about to become a victim of one of the most serious crimes anyone could possibly commit: the sexual rape of a

child.’ Other elements of the writer’s account reveal a quite different culture. As a boy he had felt ‘hero worship’, indeed for the whole class this teacher was ‘our hero’; ‘other boys ... had heard ... that a visit to his bedroom was the ultimate accolade for “special friends”’; ‘I was trembling with excitement and desire at the thought he was going to have sex with me’ (Don Boyd, *The Observer*, 19 August 2001). Such enthusiastic collusion in what both parties *at the time* might wishfully regard as an offence-without-a-victim is often impossible for the authorities to detect, or at least to prove.

Both the boarding schools of Britain and the educational system, indeed the whole social system of Sparta were intensely hierarchical. (Thucydides observed of the Spartan army, in his own day, that it consisted almost entirely of ‘officers over officers’: 5.66.4.) Enthusiastic collusion in sex between those of different rank tends to subvert hierarchy. In an educational context it produces favouritism, bitterly resented by the young as some of their number are perceived as unfairly receiving high rewards – or light punishment. In a military context – and both Sparta and the Public School system were preoccupied by the need to make the young soldierly – sexual collusion may produce chaos: for example, if (in modern terms) a private is known to be having an affair with a general, how is a sergeant or a lieutenant to give orders or punishment to the private in the normal way? Sparta’s reaction to the problem was to institutionalize such relations across the power lines: by recognizing as a couple two lovers of different statuses, it might be far easier for hierarchy – and society generally – to make allowances in the treatment of the individuals concerned. Thus, for example, adult lovers could – without scandal – deliberately be placed either together in a battle line or be widely separated. The contrast between the Public Schools and Sparta, in the management of what was a very similar problem, may even recall the difference between some modern universities in the handling of (similarly widespread, and usually heterosexual) affairs between teacher and student. Some universities repress, insisting on the exclusion of the teacher. Others, in contrast, impose no automatic punishment but require that the teacher report the relation institutionally, so that he or she can be removed from all formal evaluation of the student – as a means of preserving the credit of the hierarchy and of its judgements in the face of a phenomenon deemed to be inevitable.

29.4 Women as a Moral Force

A reason why this chapter has had nothing so far to say about girls’ education in the two cultures is that, in both and for similar reasons, there was far less formal provision for the collective upbringing of females. The Spartan system had as one prime aim to produce disciplined military courage which was by definition among Greek-speakers a ‘man’s thing’ (*andreia*, *andreion*). It is

highly likely that one main purpose of Sparta's bringing its boys together into a state-controlled system was to reduce the influence of women. Small boys at Sparta were removed from their mothers and sisters rather for the same reasons as young husbands were discouraged from spending much time with their wives. If soldiers, or future soldiers, were to have the correct self-subordinating attitude to death and due loyalty to their fellow-fighters, they had better not have one eye on a comforting home where women might shelter them morally and physically. Women might overlook any failures on some battlefield far away from the female view. Therefore, if women *could* be controlled by men (and Sparta had noteworthy problems in this sphere), they were to be trained as viragos, inciting their sons and husbands to fight bravely and die if necessary (Figueira (2010) 276). That, famously, was the Spartan ideal for female utterance: 'Come back with this shield or on it' (that is, come back having stood your ground in battle or having died bravely). That this was a vigorously-promoted ideal of female mentality suggests that Sparta feared the opposite; this was a society, according to Aristotle (intensely critical of Sparta), where men in reality were dominated by women (*gynaikokratoumenoi*: *Pol.* 1269b). Xenophon, in one of his many unintentionally revealing moments, explains why Sparta had chosen the colour red for its soldiers' cloaks. He does not say that it was the most virile colour, but that 'it was least feminine' (*Lak. Pol.* 11.3). How did the British Public Schools compare?

Only late in the twentieth century did Public Schools in general begin to admit girls. Traditionally the schools had been of their essence masculine. Arnold, in removing even the 'dames' who had managed the boys' lodgings, was acting like other school authorities of his day (Honey (1977) 11; Copley (2002) 162; Hickson (1995) 130 for women excluded and portrayed as 'hags' at twentieth-century Downside). In their best-known form, from Arnold's day to the mid-twentieth century, the schools' primary aim was to produce trained men for the masculine professions: to control navy, army, the church, the law, the colonies, industry and business – and, of course, national government. In later life, these men would be 'in country curacies [as Anglican priests], London chambers [as barristers], under the Indian sun, and in Australian towns and clearings' (Thomas Hughes (1857), quoted at Copley (2002) 161–2). The fact that women had no vote until after World War I reflected a deep belief (and not only among men) that women in general – Miss Nightingale might be allowed to be an exception – had no aptitude for such spheres. Famously, boys at Prep School (let alone Public School) were liable to be persecuted for showing emotions – such as crying or clinging to symbols of home – which suggested attachment to the world of mother. Arnold, surprisingly, preached against the Rugby boys' tendency to 'feel ashamed ... of being attached to their mothers and sisters and fond of their society' (Honey (1977) 22). An anti-female culture was evidently well established by 1840.

In enforcing the ethos of male society, however, women played an important part. 'Big boys don't cry' remained a widespread slogan in British society until the late twentieth century; in many cases – perhaps in most cases – it was uttered by women. As reportedly at Sparta, women played an essential moral role in directing men towards physical bravery. The widely-remembered action of upper-class English women during World War 1 in humiliating men by presenting them with white feathers, symbol of cowardice, unless they enlisted, may in reality have been exaggerated in its extent. Siegfried Sassoon, poet and decorated infantry officer of the First World War, described (in his *Glory of Women*) women's role in the war with the skilfully-ambiguous line, 'You make us shells'. Shells for the women of Britain and Germany; shields for those of Sparta. Widespread, into the late twentieth century, was the insistence of English women that boys forgo comfort and live rigorously, to avoid becoming 'milsops' and 'molly-coddled', two suggestively-feminine terms. The boys in question probably had no idea what a 'molly' was. They might think of the Latin *mollis*, 'soft', as well as of the female forename, but 'molly-house' in eighteenth-century English had meant what we would call a gay brothel. The concept of molly-coddling remained a formidable moral instrument at the disposal of women: here was an accusation of effeminacy that no boy wanted.

An extreme case – but revealing because the woman concerned was in her day hailed as highly successful – was Beatie Sumner, product of late Victorian aristocracy and wife of a revered sportsman (the cricketer C.B. Fry). She founded a naval training school for boys, 'The Mercury' in Hampshire. In the words of a liberal critic in the mid 1980s:

Beatie established a regime like a sadist's daydream. As a young woman, she had gamely led the boys barefoot up the rigging. Now she gave orders ... [The boys] went barefoot in all weathers ... Their heads were shaved. Their letters were read. They were ceremonially flogged, bent over the breech of a gun, before their assembled comrades. ... The food was foul and insufficient. Pointless drilling exhausted them beyond the point of collapse; one boy died under the instructor's boot. Meanwhile the school, and Beatie, became famous and respectable.

(V. Glendinning, *Sunday Times* 11.8.1985, reviewing R. Morris, *The Captain's Lady*)

We cannot say whether the resemblance here to ancient images of Sparta was deliberate or simply a case of parallel ideals arising from parallel militarized structures. But the bare feet for boys, the ceremonial flogging, the food and the possibility of death recall details from Xenophon and Plutarch.

If on occasion Spartan men seemed to have lost their courage, they were described as having gone 'soft' (*malakoi*, Thuc. 5.72.1, 75.3): the normal state of Spartans was supposedly the opposite. Correspondingly, Sedbergh Public School, which for a time figured itself explicitly as Sparta, also styled itself, in

its motto, 'hard nurse of (real) men', *dura virum nutrix*. This seemingly is a modern translation into Latin of a Homeric phrase (*Od.* 9.27) which had referred not to Sparta but to Ithaca. The Latin expression in any case hints once more at the essential role of women in producing tough men; in Antiquity, Spartan women might supposedly boast of being the only females in Greece to produce real men (Plut. *Lyk.* 14; Figueira (2010) 282). On the principle that an ideal expressed is a fear revealed, here one may detect – in Sparta as in the Public Schools – a fear of softness, of the soft nurse, and an implicit promise to repress such weakness.

29.5 'Softness' and Deviants

Within the Public Schools, and to some extent in the adult institutions which they fed, signs of 'softness' of character in men might be vigorously persecuted. A writer in the *Spectator* magazine of 15 June 1889 conceded that 'softs' in the Public Schools remained a problem, but they were fewer than before and 'a great deal more unhappy'. The achievement of making a deviant miserable is recorded with satisfaction in a memoir of life at Cambridge University between the World Wars:

Freaks and conceited fools were not suffered gladly, and odd 'behaviourism' was promptly dealt with ... one unpleasant young man returned after a vacation with a most conspicuous moustache. Rightly or wrongly, he was sat on ... while half of it was shaved off. The rest was left to his sense of symmetry.

(Salisbury Woods (1962) 28)

Here it is hard to avoid thoughts of conscious imitation of Sparta, where (according to Plutarch (*Ages.* 30)) officially-recognized cowards, the *tresantes* ('those who had trembled', in battle), were obliged to signal their absurdity by wearing only half a beard. Such cowards were also, according to Xenophon (*Lak. Pol.* 9.5), forbidden to appear happy in public.

Sparta was famous for its use of the morally edifying spectacle. Some spectacles might be positive: Xenophon salutes the Spartan king Agesilaos for making his men give the visual impression by their zealous military training that a city in which they found themselves (Ephesos) was 'a workshop of war' (*Ages.* 1.26–7; *Hell.* 3.4.16–18). Other Spartan spectacles were meant to impress negatively: helots forced to dance drunkenly, and *tresantes* obliged to appear in public as physically absurd and abject. A rather similar, though superficially more light-hearted, message was conveyed in a series of English novels for boys, about Public School life, which was extremely popular in the early twentieth century and is now excluded on principle from many children's libraries: the *Billy Bunter* books by Frank Richards (in reality a

thoughtful and politically sensitive man, whose real name was Charles Hamilton; George Orwell sparred with him in print). Bunter, a teenaged pupil at boarding school, Greyfriars, is anti-hero, the sum of absurd deviance. He is a coward and cannot stand pain: ‘Ow! Gerroff! You beast. Gerroff! Ow!’ (Richards (1967), 44): no fox under *his* cloak. He is, rather like Sparta’s officially-identified cowards, dressed deviantly: his bow tie and check trousers contrast with the uniform of all his classmates. (In reality, such breach of school uniform would have been impossible.) He is an incompetent liar, boasting about his parents’ modest suburban villa as ‘Bunter Court’, where honey is produced from extensive ‘hunneries’. He alone wears glasses, to contrast with the athletic regularity of his classmates. And above all he is to be viewed as uniquely unathletic because grossly fat. This last quality is entirely his fault (observe the cake in the illustration at [Figure 29.1](#)). His classmates tease him accordingly: ‘I told you that fourteenth helping was a mistake!’ Here, as at Sparta, is a moral lesson in the flesh, well adapted to children’s talent for bullying those perceived as anomalous. And to reconstruct the positive morals which are implied, the reader was simply to observe Bunter’s qualities and to invert.

Athleticism and physical courage are here not the only ideals shared with Sparta: Spartans – apart from the *tresantes* – were noted also for uniformity of dress, both in daily life and on the battlefield. In addition we hear of a Spartan, Naukleidas, being fined for fatness (Athen. 550 d–e; Aelian *VH* 14.7). But the resemblance between the ideals of the Public Schools and of Sparta goes beyond such particulars. An overall homogeneity was valued. First, further evidence from the fiction about Bunter, this time involving the portrayal of non-deviants, of ordinary, positively-viewed chaps. Their dialogue is almost antiphonal:

‘Oh, bother Greyfriars!’, said Monson. ‘I’m fed-up with Greyfriars an’ Greyfriars cads!’

‘Fed up to the chin!’ agreed Gadsby.

‘Absolutely!’ yawned Vavasour.

(Richards (1967) 52)

Again:

‘My hat!’ said the captain of the Remove.

‘My nose!’ mumbled Johnny Bull.

‘Ow! My eye!’ moaned Frank Nugent ...

‘What about class?’ asked Mark Linley.

A chorus of groans answered him.

‘A chorus’. We recall that a poet around 500 BC described the Spartans as like cicadas, ‘eager for a chorus’ (Pratinas, at Athenaeus 633a). Contrast characters in recent Anglophone fiction for the young, such as the more dissonant *Beavis and Butthead* of Mike Judge:

BUTTHEAD:

Chicks with bikinis – and explosions. That’s like, huh huh, COOL.

BEAVIS:

Yeah, cool.

BUTTHEAD:

Shuddup, Beavis!

Harmonious collectives of young heroes and heroines were common in early twentieth-century British literature, such as *Swallows and Amazons* of Arthur Ransome (1930), or (by two female writers) the *Just William* series by Richmal Crompton (published from 1922 to 1970, about the suburban William Brown and his gang, the ‘Outlaws’), and the two child-detective series *The Famous Five* (published 1942–63) and *The Secret Seven* (1949–83) by Enid Blyton. Contrast the *Harry Potter* series of Joanne Rowling (from 1997 onwards), about a bespectacled hero who began his literary life confined at home. Arguably the fantasist Harry Potter is the representative of a generation of children house-bound with their electronic toys, alone for a reason (involving perceived sexual risk) analogous to the reason for which earlier children in Public Schools had been confined in groups and closely policed. But whereas Harry Potter reflects a generation growing up to be solitary specialists at their terminals, the collectivism of earlier British literature about the young reflected children bred for the chummy conservatism of a group who – in harmony against others – would run an empire.

29.6 Song and the Invention of Tradition

Different Public Schools had cultures which differed slightly from each other; the differences might indeed be emphasized as a matter of honour. There was ‘the Eton unembarrassment of which we are proud’ (Honey (1977) 218–19), including the unashamed poise with which Etonians would offer themselves as leaders. The more academic Winchester produced ‘almost compulsive

conformists, brilliant but safe men' (Honey (1977) 224). Harrow fiercely defended its own variety of conformism (Mangan (1981) 215). Schools emphasized their antiquity and their difference by inventing local tradition and pseudo-archaic language (Sparta, too, did both, and for similar reasons: this work, [Chapter 1](#)); Harrow on occasion tried to be different – in respect of invented difference. When in 1987 the then headmaster of Harrow, Ian Beer, was perceived as inventing traditions, Old Harrovians went to the press, complaining that: 'Harrow once prided itself on not stooping to meaningless Latinisms and pretentious language. Beer must be stopped.' (*Evening Standard*, London, 22.9.1987). For more thoughtful comment on the invention of tradition at the Harrow of the mid-nineteenth century, see Tyerman (2000) 301.

Invented tradition, as at Sparta, was importantly conveyed in song. Metre (and, in the British case rhyme) tended to exclude deviation. Sparta used indoctrination by songs, and especially those of Tyrtaios, to incite military courage and *esprit de corps* (Calame, this work, [Chapter 7](#), and Powell (1994) 302); Plato wrote that Spartans were 'replete' with these songs (*Laws* 629b). The theme is instructively echoed by a former pupil of Victorian Harrow:

Harrow Songs ... made for something greater than entertainment. They are instinct with public school spirit, a clarion call to strenuous endeavour, an injunction to work and play with faith and courage, to fight against odds, to follow up wherever the Light may lead, and to sacrifice self, if need be, to the common end. No finer sermons have ever been preached, and none that lingers longer in the memory.

(Vachell (1923) 30, quoted at Tyerman (2000) 344)

Another Old Harrovian, the Conservative politician Leo Amery, wrote that his school's songs were 'an all-round education in themselves, the embodiment of a manly conception of personal life, of public duty and public policy' (Honey (1977) 139). Amery's contemporary at Harrow in the years around 1890, Winston Churchill, likewise ingested the message of the songs (Honey (1977) 139; Tyerman (2000) 344–5).

The invented past, conveyed by such songs, 'deliberately excluded suggestion that the school after 1874 was, in any essential way, new' (Tyerman (2000) 301; 308–9, 344 on Harrow songs; 329 on 'Harrow's cloying pseudo-history'). The headmaster who promoted such songs in the 1870s, H.M. Butler, 'concealed change, brutal choices' (Tyerman (2000) 301). A historian of the school in 1936 claimed that 'continuity has never been broken' (P. Bryant, cited at Tyerman (2000) 490). This vividly recalls post-revolutionary Sparta of the classical period, with its apparent claim that its constitution was, by c.400 BC, 'slightly more than 400 years old, approximately' (Thuc.1.18.1), and also Plato's insistence in his Sparta-inspired *Laws* (798a–b), that the community should be deceived into thinking that no previous constitution had

even existed. Plato in that work faced the difficulty of designing a new community – largely but not entirely on Spartan lines – which was meant swiftly to become oblivious of its own newness. Remarkably, he proposed that the new community’s principles, as set out in his very long book, should be inculcated *in full* by song (*Laws* 664b). Modern scholarship concerning Sparta has learned to be wary of the Spartans’ claims to have conserved their constitution through the classical period largely unchanged since Lykourgos. That wariness is echoed, in a different sphere, by a recent historian of Harrow School: ‘In an institution limed with the past, present habit acquired the standing of immutable practice, until the next change’ (Tyerman (2000) 441). Change often took the form of preserving old behaviour while radically changing the justification for it, and perhaps adjusting its form.⁴

29.7 Public School ‘Types’ and Spartan ‘Similars’: The Importance of Social Isolation

Again, a professed ideal can usefully be decoded. If (subtle) differences between schools are idealized, the feared default is – uniformity. Indeed, uniformity in most matters was itself an ideal, which the Public Schools attained to a degree which recalls the Spartan *homoioi*. The English classicist R.L. Nettleship, comparing the Public School system with Plato’s *Republic*, wrote in the late nineteenth century:

The successes of our Public School system have lain, much more than in any particular stimulus that they have given to literary or scientific activity, in the production of certain types of character and the preparation for the art of life.

(Nettleship (1935) 47–8)

Another Oxford classicist, T.L. Papillon, wrote, ‘Many a lad who leaves an English public school disgracefully ignorant ... yet brings away ... a manly straightforward character, a scorn of lying and meanness, habits of obedience and command, and fearless courage.’ (Darwin (1929) 21–2). Ideals shared with Sparta are numerous and clear. Public School boys after Arnold’s day were commonly taught that ‘all but the most material forms of intelligence were slightly effeminate’ and that they should ‘rely on action rather than ideas’ (Mangan (1981) 106), notions which would have been readily understood by the Spartan leaders Archidamos (commending Spartan ignorance: Thuc. 1.84.3) and Brasidas (Thuc. 5.9.10). An implied link between abstract thought and softness is apparent when Perikles, shown defending his Athens against Sparta and its ideology, felt obliged to claim that Athenians ‘enjoy theorizing without being soft’ (Thuc. 2.40.1). The Clarendon Commission’s phrase ‘capacity to govern others and control

themselves', and Papillon's words 'habits of obedience and command' echo a commonplace of Antiquity concerning Spartan excellence in knowing how to 'rule and be ruled', *archein kai archesthai* (Powell (1994) 274).

In Antiquity, Sparta's geographic situation, isolated from neighbours by mountains and far from the sea, was seen as a main reason for her success in maintaining a distinctive character. Plato was clear that such isolation was desirable for the production of distinctive ideals (*Laws* 706a). The Public Schools would follow a similar principle. Harrow and Westminster might be seen as losing cachet as expanding London encroached upon them. The new, or refounded, schools of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were typically far from great cities: examples (from among many) are Hurstpierpoint, Lancing, Marlborough, Oundle, Sedbergh, Uppingham, and their Roman Catholic counterparts at Ampleforth, Downside and Stonyhurst. When Charterhouse school moved, from all-too-accessible London to the country town of Godalming in 1872, a huge rise in pupil numbers resulted (Honey (1977) 143). The country towns in question were just large enough to supply servants and supplies, but were small enough to be politically dominated by the school: the owners of pubs (let alone of worse places of debauchery) could be pressed to exclude or report boys who sought illicit pleasure. School playing-fields added a further layer of insulation: anyone crossing them in either direction was likely to be seen. Eton (near Windsor) had the good fortune to be many miles from London. Yet it too had to resist the threat of unwanted contacts: as the new Great Western Railway threatened to approach Eton in 1835, the Duke of Cumberland objected in Parliament to the likely disturbance of discipline among the Eton boys (*Hansard*. 27 August 1835).

Isolation brings costs, and much inconvenience. Why was isolation deemed necessary? The cases of Sparta and the Public Schools illuminate each other. The historian is trained to look for the overall workings of institutions, their role in a wider political system. But the parents of Sparta or Britain who consented to send their children away, and in the British case at least to 'pay high' for it, were probably not always, or usually, motivated mainly by thoughts of what was best for their society. More useful, as explanation, is the sweeping biological approach of Aristotle in the *Politics* (1252a), according to which every living creature wishes to be leave behind offspring resembling itself. Parents in our two systems are likely to have been motivated above all, in creating and maintaining their various systems of education, by concern over social mobility. Admittedly, some British parents wished their children *not* to be entirely like themselves. They sent their children away so that they would meet their social superiors. The 'forming of great acquaintances' ('contacts', in modern idiom) was a parental motive officially recognized (Mangan (1981) 132–4); the poet Cowper in the eighteenth century ironically noted that, for some, it was more alluring to be acquainted with an earl or a

duke than with Latin grammar. But in both our societies access to the boys of grandest lineage was limited. Spartan heirs-apparent to the kingship were seemingly excluded from the communal education of boys. In Britain, only a small minority of Public Schools would predictably contain many sons of peers. The form of social mobility that most exercised parents, in Sparta as in Britain, is likely to have been of the downward variety. As Edward Thring wrote (c.1873), albeit with a vested interest as headmaster of Uppingham, 'I think ... that it is the fixed idea of every Englishman ... that it is the thing to send a boy to a public school, and the ordinary English gentleman would think he lost caste by not doing so' (Honey (1977) 145–6). The idea was neatly implied in a common insult: a 'home-made gent' was no gent at all. Gentlemen (apart from young aristocrats) could not be made at home; they had to go away to school.

As late as the mid-twentieth century in Britain and Ireland, with social and political distances reduced by universal education, it was common to hear prosperous parents explain why they had decided to send a child to boarding school at a particular time: 'He [sometimes 'she'] was starting to sound like the local children.' A regional accent might, in adult life, make their offspring *déclassé*; parents concerned with keeping caste, including for the child's sake, might exert themselves to prevent such. Here are two examples from the present writer's personal knowledge. Both date from c.1960; each episode culminated in physical punishment:

Educated parent: Say 'like that'!

Small Leicester boy (innocently): 'lahk thah'

(Bang!)

Educated parent: Say 'my coat' !

Small Dublin girl (defiantly): 'mih coaht!'

(Bang!)

The comic aspect, in retrospect, of such discipline may mislead: it was, and no doubt continues to be, of great importance in many societies – and all the greater where social distances are more alarming. Where differences of speech carry a political threat, imposition of discipline is likely to be severe, as in North-Eastern Greece of modern times, with its insecure borders. Greeks of today tell that their former Prime Minister Konstantinos Karamanlis (1907–98) was beaten at home as a child for calling bread by a name he had learned

from Bulgarian-speaking children of his village. In the Victorian Public Schools, where the nation's poor might still be conceived as 'the Great Unwashed' or 'the heathen within', intense concern could be expressed about the degree of assimilation which might take place even in the school holidays:

The effect of their holiday homes ... would be ... to lower the standard which the school had been trying to raise ... by the mean habits and vulgar tricks which it would renew in them, the cockney or provincial slang which it would reinfuse into their speech, out of all of which they were being refined. ... there is little of that honourable love of truth, which distinguishes English public-school boys, to be found in the homes of the lower middling class.

(Henry Hayman, a future headmaster, writing in 1858: quoted at Honey (1977) 148–9)

And in ancient Sparta? Spartan children of the landowning class probably resembled their British or Irish counterparts in one demographic respect. The children in each society are likely to have been very heavily outnumbered, around their own homes, by children of far lower status. The very young are impressively adaptable: if privileged Spartan children were left to roam free for long periods, their chosen playmates would often be the children of helots – and assimilation would result. (Even in the market place of Sparta we hear that citizen adults might be outnumbered some 100:1 by those of lesser status: Xen. *Hell.* 3.3.5.) We do not know whether the Dorian dialect which helots spoke differed much from the Greek of the Spartans; so thoroughly have helots – the majority population of Laconia and Messenia – been effaced from history that we do not possess the name of, let alone have any words from, a single helot individual. But attitudes, dress and comportment were no doubt very different. We hear that impressive strength and stature could get a helot man killed; such things were therefore probably dissimulated as far as possible by humble posture and clothing. Spartans in contrast were masters of the impressive pose. Helots freed from Spartan control by the Theban invasion of 370/69 were reportedly urged by the invaders to sing them verses from Sparta's favourite poets: the helots refused, because 'the masters [Spartans] wouldn't like it' (Plut., *Life of Lykourgos* 28). The story suggests that the helots knew the poems, and that the Spartans might have wished that they didn't. Culture had simply leaked from one group to the other, through proximity. We should ask a corresponding question: How would the Spartans have liked it if their own children had started to resemble little helots (or indeed if young helots had acquired a few Spartiate ways)? The reaction is likely to have been utter horror.

In addition to individual parents' anxiety about the declassament of their own offspring, there would be a wider fear, that the distinctive qualities in which the Spartans as a group took such pride might be diluted and vanish in the sea of helots. Related, but more pressing still, would be a fear of divided loyalties.

Spartans were formally and permanently at war with the helots: the declaration of war was made annually, so that it would be religiously permissible to kill the latter (Aristotle, cited at Plut., *Life of Lykourgos* 28). Helots who had impressed in the limited military tasks assigned to them, were particularly likely to be massacred as a precaution, as being potentially the most effective rebels (Thucydides 4.80). Adult Spartans could not be allowed to hesitate over such killing, distracted by thoughts that here were men who excelled according to military values and who in childhood had been their friends.

The British case may help us to see why the Spartans, with their exceptionally high ratio of unfree to free in Laconia and Messenia, should have taken the exceptional measure (by Greek standards) of bringing the children of (almost) all citizens together for collective education supervised by the state. Once assembled in their age-classes, Spartan children could be taught more effectively that helots were different, inferior, contemptible. The helots deliberately made to perform drunken dance in front of *young* Spartans (Plut., *Life of Lykourgos* 28) were meant to act as a general lesson of how crude and incompetent helots were: the regimented displays of sober dancing by Spartans themselves at their festivals no doubt served as counterpoint in the matter of elegance.⁵ (See [Figure 29.2](#).) British memoirs of Public School life sometimes emphasize how boys were inducted into contempt for the general population (known widely, at least from the 1930s, as 'oiks', a term of unknown origin). A former pupil of twentieth-century Loretto (at Musselburgh, outside Edinburgh) has written:

We called Musselburgh's other schoolchildren 'keelies' and were taught to ignore them. Any contact was forbidden, and would have been a beatable offence. A cane would be administered by prefects ... *Spartam nactus es, hanc exorna* is the school's motto ... Like the Spartans, we were supposed to be superior. We were the ruling elite.

(D. Boyd, *The Observer*, 19 August 2001)



"You're one of 'em! I'll smash you!"

Figure 29.2 Public School poise and the downfall of a – physically powerful – oik

(From *Billy Bunter and the School Rebellion* (1967), first published in 1928 in the boys' magazine *The Magnet*.)

The horror of contamination by contact with children of ordinary background

explains one of the least sympathetic of the reforms carried out, somewhat covertly, by Arnold and other Victorian school authorities: the sabotaging and ultimately suppression of the ‘Lower Schools’ associated with the senior Public Schools. These ancient foundations had been created to equip younger children from the local area, and of non-wealthy family, with the necessary knowledge – especially of Latin – to enter the senior school. Arnold’s devious opposition to the principle embarrasses even an admiring modern biographer (Copley (2002) 170–4). But the decline of the Lower Schools, or rather their amputation from the senior institutions, was widespread in England (Bamford (1960) ch. 12; Honey (1977) 124; Copley (2002) 172; Tyerman (2000) ch. 12); this process, and the establishment of Sparta’s socially-exclusive education, illustrate each other. Classical terms were used in the formation of British elite school dialect: ‘Cave!’, ‘Look out!’, from Latin *cave*; ‘tunding’ (‘beating’), from Latin *tundo*; ‘yack’ (‘throw’), apparently from Latin *iacio*; ‘Senior Inferior’ at Malvern School (*Observer* (London), 26.4.1992) which recalls the Spartan term *hypomeiōn* (‘Inferior’, a citizen with restricted rights). It seems just possible that the term ‘oik’ was coined from, or reinforced by, the Greek word *perioikoi* (‘dwellers around’), the name given at Sparta to free but politically inferior neighbours.

29.8 Sparta and the British Public Schools: Achievements Shared – and Differences

What should they know of England, who only England know?

(Rudyard Kipling, ‘The English Flag’, 1891)

Till recently it was thought proper to pretend that all human beings are very much alike, but in fact anyone able to use his eyes knows that the average of human behaviour differs enormously from country to country ...

(Orwell, ‘The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius’ (1968 [1941] 56)

Public school and state school do not mix easily.

(T.E. Lawrence (1978 [1936] ch. 21)

Historians in modern times are often reluctant to explain actions by reference to the morale, high or low, of the actors. Morale, it may seem, is not verifiable on any physical measure, and so should be excluded from scientific analysis of history. However, the cases of Sparta and of the British boarding schools make the concept hard to avoid. The founder of modern study of Sparta, the

late Geoffrey de Ste. Croix, when questioned in private conversation by the present writer about morale among former pupils of British Public Schools, emphatically identified two such schools: of Winchester he said ‘Wykehamists got a tremendous sense of morale from the school and regarded themselves as tremendously privileged for having been to the school’; of Etonians, ‘They really did feel something tremendous.’ Such morale might be crucial in determining whether a man put himself into a physically or socially dangerous situation. Sparta’s military actions, not only in the mythicized case of Thermopylai but in better-attested episodes over the following hundred years, reflect an extraordinary self-confidence. First Brasidas (in 424) then Gylippos (in 414–3) were sent into Athenian-dominated spheres with virtually no other Spartans in their (small) forces. Yet they were expected to make an enormous difference by their courage and military acumen – which they did, in the Thraceward region and in Sicily respectively. Sparta was no doubt buoyed by their example when, in 396, it allowed its king Agesilaos officially to invade the Persian empire. That empire embraced most of the Middle East; Agesilaos’ general staff consisted of only thirty Spartan officers (Cartledge (1987) 212–13). Until it unexpectedly lost its empire in 371, Sparta took no drastically effective measures to arrest the numerical decline of its own citizen population. On the eve of Leuktra, in that year, Sparta’s citizens seem to have included no more than some 1200 fighting men. Whether or not we see, with hindsight, Spartan demographic policy as deluded in an imperial power (Roche (2013b)), that policy is of a piece with the military confidence just noted.

In Sparta’s case we can glimpse the deliberate manufacture of a sense of deep superiority, that is, of high morale. We have copious evidence that such morale existed, and influenced policy. For the British Public Schools the evidence of morale deliberately engendered, and enacted in politics and soldiering, is far more copious still. For decades in the mid-nineteenth century Britain’s prime ministers came almost uninterruptedly from Harrow. Stanley Baldwin and Winston Churchill continued the tradition (with interruptions, most notably by Neville Chamberlain, educated at Rugby, and Clement Attlee, schooled at Haileybury) between 1923 and 1955. From the eighteenth century to the time of writing, nineteen prime ministers have been educated at Eton. On becoming leader of the Conservative party (in 2005), David Cameron included thirteen fellow Old Etonians in his front-bench team. Stanley Baldwin, speaking to a group of his fellow Harrovians in 1923, said:

When the call came for me to form a government, one of my first thoughts was that it should be a government of which Harrow should not be ashamed. I remembered how in previous governments there had been four, or perhaps five, Harrovians, and I determined to have six.

(quoted at Honey (1977) 155)

Playful boasting apart, Baldwin's words – and, more importantly, the fact of his choice of ministers – reflect affinity and its familiar offshoot: trust. Here were men, from his old school with its homogenizing culture, whom he felt he could understand and predict. *Part* of the reason for the high morale of Public School men was their belief, as encouraged by Baldwin, that they could rely on each other for protection – and promotion. Another part of the reason is, that – as at Sparta – so many others of their group had succeeded before them.

When Spartans went into battle, they did so with an immediate advantage. A hoplite phalanx, once broken, became – in Aristotle's word – 'useless'. Spartans, even before battle, could be confident that their own phalanx would not break except under the most unusual circumstances: their own men would not turn and run. A phalanx opposing them would believe this too – of the Spartans. But concerning their own side, Sparta's enemies in many cases could have no such confidence. On occasion we read of a phalanx opposed to that of Sparta breaking and running even before the point of engagement (Thuc. 5.72.4). For most Greek armies, perhaps for most armies of history, one of the most effective inducements to run is the fear that one's own neighbours and allies may do so. The bravest soldier, if isolated among enemies, will expect to be killed; the bravest force, once surrounded, is usually defeated. The *character* imposed by the imperial Public Schools, the *pluck* demanded on pain of permanent humiliation, probably meant that officers from that background could – like Spartans – count on each other to a degree unusual in military history. The death-rate among young Public School-educated officers on the Western Front during World War I (e.g. Maclean (1923)) is, like that of Spartan commanders in the classical period, public testimony to the courage and (indirectly) to the confidence engendered by their respective systems of upbringing. Aristotle, passionately opposed to the use of Sparta as a positive model, implied that Spartan education aimed at one virtue to the exclusion of (almost) all others: physical courage (*Politics* 1338b). Orwell, similarly intense in his criticism, claimed – as we have seen earlier – that willingness to die for one's country was the 'first and greatest' of virtues advocated by Public Schools. But in both cases the critic may have tended to mistake one characteristic, genuine, unusual and spectacular, for overall character. It was not the supreme aim of Sparta or of the Public Schools to die for the group, but to *live* in such a way that the group, and as many as its members as possible, should survive and rule.

The contempt among Public Schoolboys for meanness and for lying (at least to each other), to which the classicist Papillon testified, might also prove a potent imperial instrument in civilian contexts.⁶ The Indian Civil Service ('ICS'), the famous 'steel frame' of British civilian rule in India, was – until the 1930s when important numbers of Indians were admitted to its ranks – a largely British Public School elite. In the late nineteenth century, men from individual schools were numerous enough to hold annual 'Old School'

dinners in India (Honey (1977) 155), Eton at Simla in the north, Marlborough at Calcutta in the east. The distances the scattered guests might need to travel may give some idea of the moral and political importance of these occasions. Under the Raj slightly more than 1000 British men dared to administer more than 300 million Indians. The qualities of the ICS were, of course, controversial. The Indian nationalist leader Nehru quoted the criticism that the organization was 'neither Indian nor civil nor a service'; Orwell, who served as an imperial policeman in Burma, wrote of 'gin-pickled old scoundrels high up in the government service' ((1937) II.9). But that the ICS (largely retained in its structure, though not in its British personnel, by the Indian government after independence in 1947) cohered at all, its few men isolated from each other by vast distances in a populous sub-continent, was probably in part due not only to a towering sense of superiority but to affinity, trust and mutual aid among men trained to share a character, to know and to care intensely about how their fellow Public Schoolboys in the Service would react to corruption or to other weakness. The phrase 'letting the side down' had, in imperial times, far more potency than in the more individualist civilizations of the West in recent decades.

There are, at first sight, differences between the Public Schools and Sparta profound enough to help explain why the comparison between the two cultures has not been made commonly in scholarship. There was, for example, no question of Eton College chaps formally declaring war each year on the oiks of nearby Slough, even though in the nineteenth century the boys of Harrow, athletic and deeply cohesive, terrorized the local population in ways which may recall Sparta's *krypteia* (Tyerman (2000) 196, 201, 212, 223), while the boys of Rugby and Marlborough schools resembled Sparta's young thieves in plundering local shopkeepers and farms. Sheer numbers precluded open war; so did Christianity – and the fact that Eton College, like all the Public Schools and deeply unlike the city-state of Sparta, existed as part of a country increasingly subject to popular elections. Book-learning (and intellectual, anti-athletic values: Mangan (1981) 189–96) had a prominent place in the Public Schools without any known counterpart in classical Sparta. Learning at these schools became in the twentieth century less classical, more scientific. Men acknowledged as among those most responsible for the technological defeat of Nazi Europe were educated (not least in self-confidence) at Public School. Hugh Dowding, who in the mid-1930s procured radar for RAF Fighter Command and then in 1940 used it to administer the aerial defeat of Germany's planned invasion of Britain (in the process facing down his own prime minister, Churchill), was educated at Winchester. Alan Turing, who in the 1930s led the invention of computer science before, during World War II, breaking German naval codes and thus thwarting German blockade of Britain, studied science and maths at Sherborne. Churchill himself left late-nineteenth-century Harrow with a lively interest in the technological and innovatory aspects of war (Edgerton (2011) index under

‘Churchill, W.’). But even the differences, between the Public Schools and Sparta, may sometimes help to explain Spartan history. Sparta’s social exclusiveness led to a fatally dwindling population, one which no amount of high morale could prevent from losing its empire in 371. The Public Schools existed to ‘confer an aristocracy upon boys who do not inherit it’, as the founder of Radley school stated in 1872 (Honey (1977) 229). Sparta, in contrast, was noted for depriving of aristocratic status men who *had* inherited it (Hodkinson (2000) ch. 13). The short life of the Spartan empire over Greece (or, more accurately, over much of mainland and eastern Greece), between 404 and 371, may be illuminated by contrast with the British case.

Plato observed that an oligarchy, so long as it stayed united, was difficult to overthrow. The idea is nicely illustrated – or may even have been inspired – by the case of Sparta at the time of her greatest defeat. After Leuktra and the consequent loss of empire, there was – as commonly in history after a grand military defeat – an attempt at revolution from within the Spartiate class. It was, apparently, swiftly repressed by king Agesilaos. Unity of values, inspired by the common education of the Similars, is likely to have been influential here, as throughout the classical period.

What of solidarity within the ruling elite of Britain, and the possible global consequences thereof? What may that have to do with the somewhat Spartan nature of British upper-class education? How might Britain (and thus the English-speaking and the English-understanding worlds) have developed without the Public Schools?

The questions are vast and barely tractable. But they are worth approaching, briefly, for the indirect light they may throw on Sparta’s dependence on her own system of schooling. For the British case, the most useful control may be the neighbouring, similarly imperial, culture of France. French families from the 1780s onwards were, it seems, moving towards a more nuclear structure, with children increasingly valued and kept close to home (Ariès (1962), cited at Honey (1977) 208). France, unlike Britain, created no pervasive and enduring structure of elite schools to which children were sent away. And yet in other respects, and over centuries, France and Britain developed remarkable similarities and it is this overall similarity that allows the *differences* between the two cultures to be evaluated. French and British scientists, technologists and artists flourished in rough parallel: Descartes with Newton; Lamarck with Darwin; Daguerre with Fox Talbot in photography; Turner and Constable with the French impressionists. French politicians in 1793, like British in 1649, scandalized a monarchic world by decapitating their king and by turning to a *degree* of republicanism. In imperial politics, France and Britain competed for North America: *Le Québec* with British Canada, *La Louisiane* (some third of the landmass of the present USA, from New Orleans to the Canadian Rockies) with the British colonies south and east of Quebec. France and Britain also fought it out for India; France secured Indo-China as its

eastern analogue of the British Raj. This list of near-parallels, and of mutual influence, political, military and intellectual, could be greatly extended, over centuries and down to the present day, though intellectuals in both countries may for patriotic reasons frequently prefer not to recognize how deep the resemblance is. But if an English-speaker reads the globally-incomparable French newspaper *Le Monde*, she or he may be struck by two differences above all, as compared with Britain, differences which may – indirectly but importantly – illuminate the comparison between Sparta and the Public Schools.

First, there is the French mastery of political psychology, as evidenced by the breadth and precision of terminology. While Anglophones regularly conceive of the ideas behind such words as *déclassement* (downward social mobility), *communautarisme* (ethnic groups keeping to themselves and privileging their own), *amalgame* (logical lumping together, especially in politically hostile fashion: ‘Labour, Tories, just the same ...’), it is significant that no neat equivalent terms exist in English. The comparison is not entirely one-sided: there is, for example, in idealizing France no neat way of saying ‘wishful thinking’. But in countless ways the student of politics finds that phenomena which in the Anglophone world are sensed only vaguely have in France already been clearly conceived, and named. France (to re-apply a phrase of Perikles) is a school, very likely *the* school, of politics. How then, given France’s long parallel development with Britain and its pre-eminence in political analysis, to explain France’s limited success – in imposing its political power, and language, in the wider world?

The answer may involve the other great difference which strikes Anglophones who study France: the depth and openness of internal divisions within that country – at almost every conceivable level of society. In 1793 revolutionary Paris sought, morally and physically, to abolish the country’s second city, Lyon as, in the previous century, Paris had wrecked the thriving (Protestant) port of La Rochelle. Since the 1790s monarchy in various forms has gone and returned repeatedly. The Republic is already on its fifth constitution. The current one was born of Charles de Gaulle’s threat to unleash against Paris rebellious paratroopers from Algeria, in 1958: that is, to risk civil war. The French practice of mutiny was particularly noticeable among infantrymen of the First World War. (Tragedy was re-run as farce a century later, when the French football team mutinied against its management in the World Cup of 2010.) The chief political parties shift, split and change names. They divide into mutually-hostile *courants* each loyal to a leader. (Anyone daring to ‘leap’ from one current to another risks being stigmatized as a *saumon*.) Ministers and magistrates brief the press against each other; distinguished academics battle to promote their *protégé(e)s*, their *entourages*. Personal vengeance, viewed sympathetically, structures not only a successful nineteenth-century novel (Dumas’ *Count of Monte Cristo*) but is a regular source of

entertainment in *Le Monde* of today: *les règlements de comptes* (settling of scores) are spectacularly recorded in *le grand banditisme* (organized violent crime) of Marseille and Corsica but also in *les grandes écoles* (the elite national campuses) of Paris. In 2014 eight Presidents of rival university campuses in Paris were obliged by the Ministry of Education to sign a formal ‘non-aggression pact’ with each other (*Le Monde*, 8 May 2014). The language of civil war is also used of tensions within the main parties of left and right, where leaders struggle to impose a ‘cease-fire’ between factions.⁷ Disunion, involving senior representatives of the French state, is itself enshrined in telling vocabulary, entirely familiar to French readers: at the extreme ‘leurs relations sont exécrables’, ‘ils se vouent une haine inexpiable’ (‘they are committed to an inextinguishable hatred’), or, more simply, ‘ils s’étripent’ (‘they are tearing each other’s guts out’). It is plain why the ideal of *rassemblement* (‘coming together (again)’) is invoked so often. In such circumstances, political energy and ambition are likely to be directed inward, rather than towards achieving influence abroad. Far from being a mere cultural curiosity, this ancient pattern of disunion may (for example) be *part* of the reason why French is not now the language of the American Mid-West.

What makes such information striking to British admirers of France is the contrast with the qualities, the vices, of Britain’s own Public School-dominated system. Here, it seems, is a crucial difference between cultures in other respects widely parallel. At the period when de Gaulle, and mutinous French generals in Algeria, were threatening to invade their own capital city, Britain was complaining of suffocating consensus at the top. The British press coined the term ‘Butskellism’, to describe the amount of agreement between leading figures in the supposedly rival parties of government: R.A. Butler of the Conservative Party and Hugh Gaitskell, leader of the Labour Party. Both men, significantly, were ex-Public Schoolboys (respectively, from Marlborough and Winchester): arguably their unity of political culture trumped party divisions. Appropriately, this informal unity produced by the imperial schools allowed the British elite to give away most of its empire, between 1947 (India) and the early 1960s (Africa) – and to concentrate on acquiring wealth abroad by other, gentler, means. That process caused within Britain no obvious internal turbulence to compare with the revolutionary paroxysms provoked in France by the decolonization of Algeria.

Every country has, no doubt, its internal hatreds within and between its ruling institutions. Many such rancours arise from diversity of personalities which themselves arise in part from regionalism as well as from differences in education. The Public School system, though at enormous (and continuing) social cost, minimized such problems *in government*. By segregating the sons of the wealthy, very largely from a desire that they not resemble the masses, the Public Schools from eastern Scotland to southern England produced a ruling class whose members resembled each other. They could, because

sharing a code of collectivist ethics, knowledge and sense of humour, *get on*, a term which significantly combines the meanings of co-existing harmoniously and making progress.

The two great powers of classical Greece, Athens and Sparta, resembled each other in their success at avoiding internal disharmony. In each, attempted revolutions within the classical period were few, and none succeeded. Athens in the late sixth century had found a way, under Kleisthenes, of unifying its citizen population by reducing the power of regionalism, whereby political chiefs might deploy rigidly-loyal, hereditary, networks based in their villages or suburbs. Sparta's system of schooling, quite possibly itself originating in the same period (although claiming to be far older), likewise produced a ruling group which acted as a counterweight to hereditary chiefs – indeed, as we have seen, heirs-apparent to the Spartan kingship were seemingly excluded from the system of schooling. It may be paradoxical to claim that the Public Schools, so conservative in their apparent ethos, served in Britain, as did the schooling of Similars at Sparta, to reduce the power of kingship and regional chiefs, and to enforce the rule of a much wider class with a shared code. But throughout most of the classical period can be detected a slow, sometimes lethal, struggle between the republican institutions of the Similars and Sparta's royal chiefs. Even in this respect there were important differences between Sparta and Britain. Spartan kings, confronted with the potency of the Similars, retained far more power, for centuries, than did British monarchs surrounded by better-educated chaps from the Public Schools: that, indeed, may help to explain the short life of Sparta's formal empire (404–371), given the limitations of king Agesilaos who dominated that period (Cartledge (1987)). Again, the Public Schools were far more open to recruits from modest lineage than was the Spartan schooling. England, in Orwell's phrase, 'was ruled by an aristocracy constantly recruited from parvenus' ((1968) 69). This contrast may help to explain the greater humanity and versatility of Public School products: many an overwhelmingly grand chap had – in Spartan terms – four helot grandparents. But what Sparta, and its education system, *shared* with the Public Schools may help to explain why Sparta, like Britain of the imperial period, successfully avoided internal revolution and was relatively free to export its energies. Sparta's painfully-imposed harmony made possible a wider and longer-lasting hegemony within the Greek world than that achieved by any other Greek state. And in consequence of her extraordinary schooling Sparta's reputation endured – as the English language *may* – far longer, as well as wider, than political empire.

29.9 Conclusions

Resemblance between Sparta and the Public Schools of imperial Britain was

complex in its origins. There was *some* deliberate, advertised, imitation of Sparta by educational authorities. The reforming Thomas Arnold was probably inspired, largely at second hand and through Plato, by Sparta's example in his ambition to mould his pupils into a miniature and morally superior community of rulers. The illustrious precedent of Sparta was widely invoked, to justify and dignify existing practices which otherwise might have seemed perilously eccentric. In retrospect, references to the Public Schools as 'Spartan' have been commonplace for over a century. But in prospect the nineteenth-century reformers, and founders, of Public Schools mostly did not invoke Sparta. That difference, between retrospect and prospect, may be crucial for understanding the resemblance between the two cultures. The Public Schools mainly did not imitate the Spartan system; they repeated it. Only when the repetition had been achieved was it widely perceived.

Imitations of a foreign culture can be conspicuously announced and yet, in the execution, superficial. So, for example, with modern attempts to create 'legions', military or civilian, with standards and formal ranks in imitation of Rome, or to mimic French *cuisine* or *couture* or hairdressing *salons*. In some cases the imitation amounts to little more than the borrowing of vocabulary. The Public Schools, with important exceptions, did not borrow much Spartan vocabulary. Had there been much conscious imitation of Sparta, that in itself might have suggested a profound difference, since the Spartans themselves had probably not been systematically imitating another culture. Rather, the Public Schools' resemblance to Sparta was systemic, proceeding not from imitation but from a shared intention – to protect, and to differentiate from the general population, a small and beleaguered group which was destined to rule. It is this deep resemblance which may make the two cultures instructive for the understanding of each other.

When two cultures coincide remarkably, information about one may be *tentatively* applied to the other. Thus, given that Sparta and the Public Schools clearly shared much in their relation to the mass of the local population, it is worth *asking* whether Sparta's unusual insistence on providing a state education, together, for the children of citizens was inspired in part by a horror of social assimilation such as is abundantly attested in the British case. The passionate modern testimony to the role of song at Public School, in the formation of character and ideals, illuminates and reinforces ancient testimony on the importance of song in Sparta's ambitious system of indoctrination. Public School emphasis on team games helps us see the significance of Sparta's attested and distinctive attachment to collective sport. Testimony on the severity and frequency of whipping at Public School likewise focuses our thought on the everyday violence recorded of Spartan education. Observing the vortex by which reforms in Public Schools were attributed to Thomas Arnold may confirm our suspicions that an extreme vortex applied to Lykourgos. Now, given that there are also countless deep differences between

our two cultures, neither case can simply be read across into the other; for purposes of positive reconstruction a comparison serves rather to suggest possibilities, to generate hypotheses which may then be tested against the (near-) contemporary evidence for the society in question. But in another respect, comparative evidence may be decisive.

In evaluating ancient evidence about Sparta, scholars have often rejected certain reported details as simply at odds with modern ideas about human nature. Very much of the traditional picture of brave and austere Spartans may be suspected of being *mirage* and propaganda. Plutarch's testimony (Life of Lykourgos, 18) that he had personally seen boys 'dying' under the lash at Orthia's festival has sometimes been diluted in translation. 'Dying' (*apothnēskontas* in the Greek) has been rendered as 'expiring', because – it has been felt – surely no sophisticated society would so annihilate its own young. Study of death (far more commonly from disease than from beating) in the Victorian Public Schools does not *prove* that Plutarch's unambiguous Greek was true. But it decisively punctures the negative generalization that such things *cannot* be true. Similarly with ancient testimony to Sparta's distinctive use of lying (see note 6, and Powell, this work, [Chapter 1](#)). Some scholars have assumed that the multiple and concordant ancient testimony on this subject amounts to no more than a hostile ethnic stereotype, that societies cannot surely differ so greatly from each other as the ancient evidence claims. Contemporary evidence on the imperial British schools again seems to invalidate such an assumption. Educational authorities claimed to have witnessed, indeed engineered, a dramatic difference in the matter of lying, within the one set of institutions. Lying by the boys to authority had been endemic in the early nineteenth century. And the reformers had achieved conversion, had replaced one custom with another, that of 'owning up'. Here too the fact that the Public Schools were not on the whole deliberately structured to resemble Sparta is important. Had they been so structured, they would be less valuable as evidence of the possibility that Sparta could generate a truly austere system independently.

The present chapter has focused mainly on certain continuities, shared culture, within and between the Public Schools. But even in our brief survey much evolution has been apparent within these British institutions, in such matters as the prominence of athletics, attitudes to sexual activity, predominance of classical languages in the curriculum, and the use of a version of Christianity by the school authorities. The schools themselves have tended to seek to mask change, to stress their own antiquity and continuity; the public may be misled. Similarly with Sparta, where insistence – over centuries – on continuity in 'Lykourgan' practice was so systematic as to amount to grand falsehood. Scholars today are increasingly alert to the chance that Spartan institutions, even under the austere 'Lykourgan' regime of the classical period, were subject to change. Acquaintance with the history of the Public Schools is

likely to encourage the search for (disguised) evolution within Sparta. Scholars in future may well resist increasingly the Spartans' claims to have created an institutional monolith. They may even come to doubt whether there was at Sparta much deep continuity at all. But here again the Public School case, and its associated public achievement, may suggest that – with high morale as its key – something exceptional did endure. To the question posed from Antiquity to the present, 'How could the Spartans bear to live such uncomfortable lives?', the imperial schools – and the popular literature about them – suggest an answer. Both systems offered membership of some of the most elating in-crowds of history. People will indeed make remarkable sacrifices to achieve a sense of superiority. Comparison with athletics is (once more) relevant: the higher the pinnacle of public success apparently within reach, the more extraordinary are the sacrifices of physical comfort which the ambitious will make.

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NOTES

1 Thus 'waste paper basket' became 'wagger-pagger-bagger'.

2 For initial bibliography on the emergence, after Arnold, of 'muscular Christianity' and the cult of team games, Tyerman (2000) 338–9. For the related cult of dying young, with the body still beautiful, Tyerman (2000) 341–3; compare Sparta and *la belle mort* (Loraux (1977)).

Author's private information.

- 4 Tyerman (2000) 336 for the evolution of whipping at Public Schools; Powell ((1998) 134) for the evolution of whipping at Sparta.
- 5 The principle of teaching a negative stereotype by exaggeration and visual staging is vigorously employed today. American films commonly portray villains as having English Public School accents. English film prefers the stereotype of stupidity, as in Monty Python's 'Upper-Class Twit of the Year'.
- 6 From Arnold onwards, the public schools worked hard and consciously to address a deeply-rooted culture among boys of lying to authority: e.g. Honey (1977) 5–6, 24–5, 44, 149, 202; Copley (2002) 121–2, 137, 139, 141–2, 163. The ideal, to some extent realized, became 'owning up' (Lawrence (1978) 98). There was no corresponding requirement for 'owning down': deceiving one's inferiors might be a vital instrument of empire. The topic of hierarchical lying in Spartan culture is similarly large and complex; see Powell (this work) [Chapter 1](#) and (1994) 284–7. In Spartan style, Plato in the *Laws* makes elaborately clear that it was not lying in general which was to be banned, but lying to authority (916d–917b).
- 7 *cessez-le-feu*: *Le Monde* 12 July 2014, of the right-wing UMP; *pacte de non-agression*: *Le Monde* 20 July 2014, of the Parti Socialiste.

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